

by Paul M. Limbert

NEW perspectives
for
the
ymca

"Of vital significance
for the potentially and
predictably great future
of our movement"

James F. Bunting

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Limbert, Paul M. 1897-
New perspectives for the
YMCA

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by **Paul M. Limbert**

Association Press, New York

new



Foreword

perspectives **for the YMCA**

NEW PERSPECTIVES FOR THE YMCA

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National Board of Young Men's Christian Associations

Association Press 291 Broadway New York N.Y. 10007

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Stock number: W-440

Price \$3.50 paperback

Library of Congress catalog card number: 64-16124



Printed in the United States of America

Foreword

"This is a timely book." This was the opening sentence of John R. Mott's 1954 Foreword to Clarence Shedd's and others' *History of the World's Alliance of the Young Men's Christian Associations*.

Certainly it is also a very appropriate first sentence for the Foreword to this present book by one of the principal makers of the most recent history of the World Alliance.

The book is timely because it deals with some of the most
5 basic contemporary concerns of religious leaders both

within and outside the YMCA. It brings to these leaders a perspective which reflects not only the author's experience as chief employed officer of the YMCA World Alliance but also his unusual earlier career as a university professor in the fields of religion and education, a staff member of the National Board of YMCA's of the United States, and the President of Springfield College. To leaders within the Association he brings an interpretation of the relevance of some of the newer theological and sociological insights and developments, while to church leaders and others interested in the YMCA he interprets some of the newer developments and concerns of contemporary Association life.

The book is timely because in a restless era when the "minutes of the previous meeting" are too often unread and the future too often appears misty and obscure, the author attempts to deal with basic problems in the light both of history's teachings and of his own particularly keen insight into future conditions.

How can local Young Men's Christian Associations make their life and service most significant in terms of their basic Christian purpose, and most relevant to the problems of **6**

their members, their communities, and their world? How in the midst of trends toward pluralism and indifferentism can Associations give distinctively Christian help to young people who want meaning for their lives but who resist traditionally approved forms of involvement and commitment? How can we rid ourselves and our Associations of irrelevancies, both pious and profane, in order to bear effective witness to the fact that we who with humility call ourselves Christians find in Jesus Christ the supreme revelation of God and the surest guidance to meaningful living? These and other basic questions are forthrightly raised and placed in a perspective which contributes substantially to the development of good answers.

The book is timely because there is so much need in the United States for YMCA leaders to follow up the National Council's 1963 reaffirmation of purpose and formulation of program implications with further hard thinking about the practical choices which local Associations must make for themselves:

- At what points of significant contact can we best meet
- 7 older youth and young adults?

- What forms of church-YMCA relationships will be most productive in the next decade?
- How do we contribute most to interracial and international understanding and friendship?
- How do we become "youth, serving" as well as "youth-serving" Associations?
- How can our leadership processes be designed to help more largely in the development of the informed, disciplined laity that will provide the ecumenical, national, and international leadership service that an increasingly complex world so badly needs?

This is a timely book because, with a concern as broad as our movement itself, with a background of experience which is unique, and with a courageous readiness to accept the risks of oversimplification in order to help us appreciate the practical complexities of our problems and opportunities, the author has reviewed relevant evidence, analyzed its implications for YMCA policies and methods, and offered specific illustrations of how to translate theory into action. 8

Truly, this is a timely book. If local YMCA leaders who share Dr. Limbert's concern will not only read it but use it as a basis for discussion and evaluation and planning, it will with equal truth be also a most useful book. Particularly will this be true if churchmen and leaders of private and public community organizations and agencies can be involved in this process. Their participation would not only increase their own understanding of the nature of the Association but would also contribute significantly to the clarification of the YMCA's understanding of its role in the community. And, with this new understanding and clarification of goals, there might well be produced new leadership for the achievement of the Association's most cherished purposes.

Obviously we need to recognize that there is such a wide range of religious backgrounds in the American YMCA movement that this book, if really used, is bound to excite debate. This is good, for one of the main purposes of the author was to stimulate his fellow workers to more sustained and incisive thinking about the basic issues which currently confront our Young Men's Christian Associations.

Finally, if we will specifically use this book to try to sense
9 the totality of our opportunity as a movement, to guide us

and our Associations in selecting for concentrated attention those tasks most consistent with our basic purpose and most relevant to the conditions of our times, and to help us devise surer ways of converting our basic unity of spirit into the strength and power of concerted action, then indeed this will be not only a timely book and a useful book but also a tool of vital significance for the potentially and predictably great future service of The Young Men's Christian Association movement.

James F. Bunting

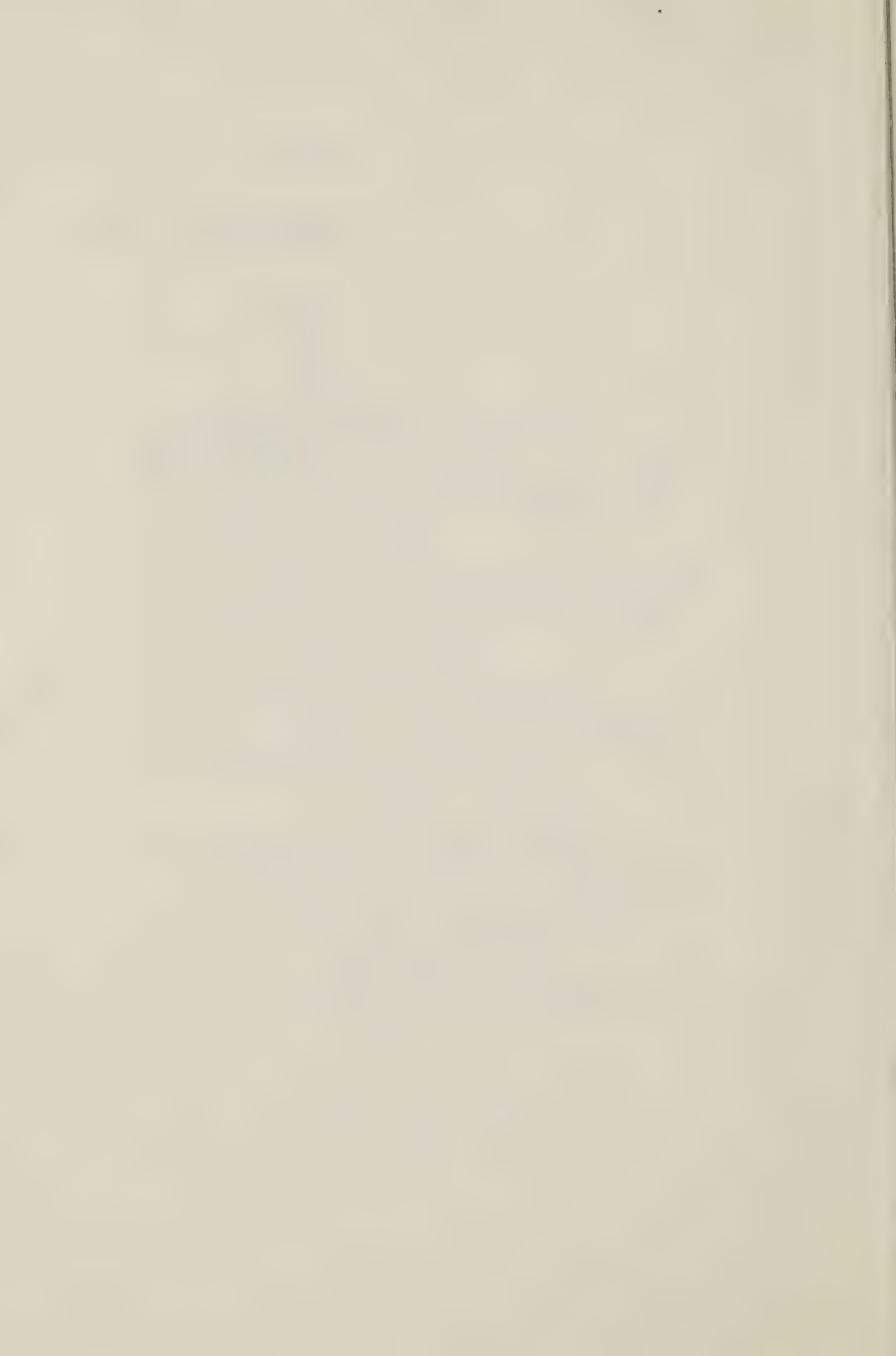
The National Board of YMCA's acknowledges with appreciation the support of the Edward W. Hazen Foundation in making this study and publication possible.

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**NEW
PERSPECTIVES
FOR
THE
YMCA**



Preface

The Young Men's Christian Association as a movement is well known but seldom understood in all its fullness. In an effort to be all things to all men, and some women, those who interpret the YMCA often find it difficult to keep the focus clear.

Returning to the United States after ten years with the World Alliance of YMCAs, I found a great deal of confusion regarding the appropriate role of a lay Christian Association
15 under the rapidly changing social and religious conditions

of the world today. This situation seems to call for a fresh examination of the Christian basis and purpose of the YMCA with special reference to the American scene.

The original proposal was a revision of my earlier book on *Christian Emphasis in YMCA Program* (New York: Association Press, 1944), now out of print. But the term "Christian emphasis" has proved to be misleading. It may suggest that this is one emphasis among many, one factor to be taken into account along with others. Unless there is a concern for the effective expression of the YMCA's Christian purpose in *all* phases of program and administration, we are in danger of slipping back into a Religious Department and failing to relate our Christian faith to every aspect of the YMCA's life and work.

The first priority, it would seem, for YMCA leaders who are prepared to make a fundamental approach is to undertake a basic theological and sociological analysis of the nature and function of the YMCA as a lay Christian movement within the present American social and religious environment. Such a study cannot be confined to practical questions of program planning, membership policy, and leadership training, although the implications of a Christian "emphasis" for all these matters must eventually be spelled out. This book seeks to be an aid toward the development

of a philosophy or strategy for the American YMCA movement. Over and over again in these pages the question is raised about the distinctive contribution which a lay Christian movement should be making to the growth of persons and the building of a better world.

What we have here, then, is not a revision of the earlier publication, nor a comprehensive review of what local Associations are doing to define and implement their Christian purpose. Yet the reader will find many references to concrete aspects of program and policy, and here and there some case studies. The focus in this book is on new perspectives, inherent in our Christian heritage and emerging from the events and issues of our day, which ought to make a difference at many points in the program and structure of the YMCA. Although attention is centered on the American situation, this is seen in a world setting and one chapter is given over to the YMCA in a world perspective.

In writing I have had in mind a rather wide range of readers. My audience in the first place is those leaders of the YMCA, both full-time secretaries and volunteer members of boards and committees, who determine to a large extent the policies of the Associations. But it is hoped also that many friends and critics of the YMCA — churchmen,
17 leaders of public and private agencies, and others — may

find here an interpretation which will give them a firmer basis for support of and co-operation with this lay Christian movement.

In order to become thoroughly familiar again with present trends and moods in the American scene, I traveled widely in the United States for six months in the early part of 1963, consulting with local leaders in a number of Associations and taking part in area and state meetings in almost every section of the country. Later the manuscript was submitted to a score of persons especially qualified to give critical judgment, and substantial revisions were made in the original draft.

I am indebted in the first place to members of the National Board of YMCAs who made it possible for me to devote some months of intensive study and consultation to this project, and especially to the then General Secretary of the Board, Herbert P. Lansdale. I am very grateful also to the many persons who shared in consultation and criticism during these months, including James Rietmulder, until recently Director of Association Press.

Yet this is by no means to be regarded as an official statement of YMCA policy and purpose. It would be extremely hazardous for any individual to presume to speak for a movement so complex and wide-flung as the Young Men's

Christian Association. But the YMCA depends for its continuing vitality on those who, knowing it well, speak the truth in love, however limited their insight. This book is written in gratitude for the opportunity to be part of a "world-wide fellowship united by a common loyalty to Jesus Christ." To the widening and strengthening of that fellowship it is dedicated.

Paul M. Limbert

A Time of Testing

On the roof of the Young Men's Christian Association in a New England city stands a large electric sign which makes the letters Y-M-C-A visible throughout the downtown area. Several years ago the lights which illuminated the third letter had gone out, and for some weeks those who passed by saw only YM-A. For many this is a parable of the situation of the YMCAs in the United States. People are asking, What has happened to the "C" in the YMCA? Have the lights that once seemed to make the Christian character of this movement clear and visible gone out in this technological age, or is there at least a constant danger that they will go out?

There is no simple answer to this question. It is reassuring to know that a number of thoughtful leaders of the YMCA movement are raising even more searching questions, such as, What does it mean to be a significant Christian Association in the American scene? Looking realistically at the kind of organization that the Young Men's Christian Association is in the United States today — diverse in religious constituency, confused about the true meaning of the word Christian, made up of autonomous units which seem to depend

for the YMCA

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for their survival on conformity to community mores—can this YMCA continue to be a significant factor for Christian life and work in the American community? Granted that this century-old, world-wide movement has an unmistakable Christian heritage, can the integrity of the YMCA as a lay Christian society be maintained under present conditions in America? Let us look at some of the factors that give point to such a query.

INCLUSIVELY CHRISTIAN

In principle YMCAs have sought to be Christian without being denominational. Their membership in the United States includes persons who are affiliated with all types of Christian churches: Roman Catholic and Orthodox as well as Protestant; conservative as well as liberal in theology; episcopal as well as congregational in structure. In fact, however, the YMCA movement in America has been identified largely with Protestantism. Youth of the Roman Catholic Church have often been warned by their bishops or priests not to take membership in the YMCA, and adult Catholics have been advised not to become YMCA board members or active supporters. Although the reasons for this position are often nontheological, there is a basic issue at stake: Is it possible for the YMCA to be an inclusively Christian organization? Can the term Christian be applied in a valid way to this kind of inclusive association which is not under any measure of supervision or control by the Church or the churches? Some Roman Catholic leaders say frankly that they could co-operate with the YMCA as a useful social and educational agency, if it made no claim to be religious or Christian. This issue is likely to become even more important as the ecumenical climate in the United States becomes much more favorable to dialogue and co-operation across confessional lines.

Clearly, there is need for a fresh examination of the YMCA as a lay Christian movement. Can laymen from all confessions take part in the life and work of the YMCA without

conflict of conscience? Can the YMCA, once a pioneer in working for Christian unity, now be regarded by *all* churches as a significant partner in the total Christian enterprise?

BROADLY RELIGIOUS

It has been part of the "essential genius" of the YMCA to include in its activities and welcome into its membership persons who are not identified as Christians: adherents of other historic faiths, those who are searching for a faith but are not yet willing to commit themselves, and others who for various reasons acknowledge no religious affiliation. In some American YMCAs individuals in one or another of these categories have risen to leadership and occasionally have become members of governing boards. Clearly, the YMCA is not a fellowship confined to Christian young men. It never puts up a sign, "For Christians only." How then, some ask, can it be really a Christian Association? The presence of non-Christians in the YMCAs of the United States has tended often to subordinate the Christian emphasis in the YMCA or to modify the statement of purpose so that Jews or adherents of other faiths can become members without embarrassment. Is this tendency inevitable? The YMCA in America has become one of many community agencies, appealing to persons of all religious affiliations and repeatedly expressing the desire to be of service to all youth. The "Christian" in its title is often interpreted so broadly that it tends to become almost meaningless, except in general ethical terms. Can a YMCA of this character maintain its validity as a Christian movement?

SOCIALLY NEUTRAL

The YMCAs of the United States are inclusive in another sense, in that their constituency is made up of persons of widely varying social and political points of view. Individuals from all political parties, all economic classes, all shades of opinion on social issues are eligible for YMCA membership.

23 Negroes and members of other minority racial or cultural

groups are within the YMCA in numbers approximately equal to their presence in the population as a whole. Such diversity is a potential influence toward unity in the community and the nation. But at the same time this diversity makes it difficult for a YMCA to deal incisively with situations calling for change in the interest of social justice and Christian love. Controversial questions are frequently avoided for the sake of maintaining harmony within the Association. Any action by a YMCA group which appears to deviate noticeably from the established patterns of the community is likely to be discouraged. There is pressure to maintain the reputation of the YMCA as a neutral organization. This tendency is accentuated by the prominence on boards of management of conservative and usually older men, whose civic and financial support is needed for the maintenance of the YMCA as an institution.

Yet within the YMCA, and particularly in Student Associations, are many who are convinced that a lay movement with an avowed Christian purpose should be a vigorous force for the changing of social structures in obedience to the gospel. This is another source from which comes the disturbing question: Can the YMCA as we know it in the United States today be Christian?

CHARACTER BUILDING

There is another type of diversity or inclusiveness in the YMCA movement which is obvious to all: the wide range of its activities and services. Many are attracted to a YMCA because of its gymnasium and swimming pool. Some are grateful for its residential accommodations. Others profit greatly from its evening schools or informal educational program. Teen-age youth are drawn to Hi-Y Clubs and summer camps. It is becoming common for an entire family to take out membership in the YMCA. One seems never to be too young or too old to be affiliated with this organization, since activities range from Y-Indian Guides or even nursery schools to Golden Age Clubs.

But this diffuseness of program makes it difficult to explain to an outsider how the YMCA differs from an athletic club or a community center. Even leaders in the YMCA are hard pressed sometimes to define what is distinctive about a YMCA program and what is the unifying Christian *motif* pervading these varied activities. When asked about the Christian emphasis in the YMCA they are likely to refer to such explicitly religious events as chapel talks or opening a meeting with prayer. It is less easy to identify precisely the quality of *any* program which should be characteristic of a Christian Association. Few organizations have as wide a range of contacts as the YMCA or touch the life of youth at so many vital points, but thoughtful leaders frequently ask to what extent the YMCA is making the kind of impact in depth on the character of individuals which can truly be called Christian.

Fresh new insights are coming from all parts of the world about what it means to be a Christian in the world. There is talk about a Christian "style of living" which goes beyond clichés about moral principles and Christian values. Granted that the YMCA is one of the important influences for the formation of character, is there not need to look at the wide range of YMCA program activities, one by one, to see precisely how these may be more effective expressions of the Christian purpose of the movement?

NEW FRONTIERS

One might attempt to make an objective appraisal of the YMCA as a social and religious organization, balancing positive and negative factors. But such an appraisal is not the purpose of this book. The YMCA is a well-established institution in the United States. It enjoys wide community support. It exhibits commendable ingenuity in adapting to changing social conditions. The questions raised in this introductory chapter about the relevance of the YMCA as a Christian movement may not be matters of life and death

25 for the YMCA as an institution. Nevertheless, to ask "Can

the YMCA in America be significantly Christian?" is by no means a purely rhetorical question. This may indeed be a time of testing for the YMCA, not as a social agency but as a lay Christian movement.

The real question, it seems, is not whether the "C" is to be removed entirely from YMCA, but whether in effect it is to be written in small letters, YMCA. The Y could continue to be "Christian," but only as a respectable institution which supports a way of life in which the distinctively Christian elements are subordinated to generally accepted principles without any sharp challenge to prevailing mores and social structures.

The focus of this book is on new perspectives for the new frontiers where Christians today are called to live and work. A frontier is an unsettled region, a place where there is a real confrontation between different ideologies or ways of life. It is a place where boundaries are not clearly defined, where the situation is fluid. But a frontier is also a place where one type of civilization is making an advance, where a new way of living may make headway in spite of resistance. On the frontier there is confusion, but there is also confidence and a sense of adventure.

From the standpoint of the Christian, a frontier is a place where God is manifesting himself in a special way in confrontation with the world. And it is a thesis of this book that the YMCA as a lay Christian movement is called to be vigorously at work on these frontiers in American life. There is much to be done by the YMCA also behind the lines; there is work of consolidation, the "garden variety" program of an institution. But the whole enterprise will gain immeasurably in meaning and vitality if there is out-of-the-ordinary, adventurous work on the front lines. If the YMCA is to be an effective instrument for the extension of God's kingdom in this world, it cannot be satisfied with sound financing and safe performance; it must also have a cutting edge.

In the chapters that follow we shall try to identify various frontier situations—particularly in the American scene but

viewed in world perspective—where forward-looking Christian groups are at work. It is our conviction that the Young Men's Christian Association has great God-given resources that equip it for making a highly significant contribution in these frontier situations. Whether or not the movement will respond to these challenges is still an open question. This is our time of testing.

The YMCA in a World

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"Come of Age"

Across the court outside St. Peter's Cathedral in Geneva, Switzerland, is a dark bronze figure of the prophet Jeremiah, hands behind his back, bent over in grief because of the sorry state of religion in his day. Centuries later another Prophet, coming in sight of Jerusalem and its imposing temple, wept over the city. It is recorded that when Jesus told his disciples what would happen to him and to them as one era came to an end and another was being born, even those closest to the Master did not grasp what he was talking about. On an earlier occasion Jesus had made a wry comment about the religious leaders of the day, saying in effect: "You are very good at looking at the sky and telling what the weather will be tomorrow; how is it that you cannot discern the signs of the times?" *¹

Today there are many well-meaning persons in Christian circles who are ready to make superficial predictions about

tomorrow. There are devoted disciples who have only a dim clue to the underlying significance of the events of our day. There are also a few prophetic spirits who sound stern warnings, although—like Jeremiah and Jesus—their pessimism is tempered by an ultimate hope.

How do YMCA leaders in America read the signs of the times? If we are to make a searching reappraisal of the YMCA situation in this country, it is imperative to review what is happening to religious institutions in the modern world and to examine some striking interpretations of what this means for Christian faith.

THE TREND TOWARD A SECULAR SOCIETY

One of the signs of our times is an unmistakable trend toward a secular form of society and a secular frame of mind. This presents a sharp challenge to Christianity and other faiths, but it is not necessarily a cause for despair. It may be that we are entering a period when the gospel can be interpreted with freshness and vitality by those who understand the true role of the Christian in the world.

One of the prophetic voices of our day, speaking to Christians who are ready to respond to a new perspective, was heard from a German prison twenty years ago. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German pastor, was held in jail for many months and finally executed because he had taken part in a plot to overthrow Hitler and his regime. His letters and papers from prison, although fragmentary in nature, penetrate like a searchlight into the confusion of contemporary thinking about religion. Writing out of a profound disillusionment with the way in which the majority of Christians had capitulated to the powers of the state, he declared at one point: "God is being increasingly edged out of the world, now that it has come of age. Knowledge and life are thought to be perfectly possible without him. . . . How can we reclaim for Christ a world which has come of age?"²

This is a striking phrase—a world come of age—but what does it mean? Certainly it cannot mean that our midtwen-

tieth-century world is settling down into a stable pattern, free from growing pains. On the contrary, changes in social structures are taking place at a rate beyond the highest predictions of a generation ago. Consider, for example, in the United States the dramatic reconstruction of one inner city after another or the drastic shift in the position and attitude of Negroes. Nor can coming of age mean that our world is becoming more rational and objective in dealing with social issues. A man from Mars who witnessed the frantic struggle to increase stockpiles of nuclear weapons in the hope of averting war, or who became aware of the diverse kinds of political systems that operate under the name of "democracy," might conclude that our world is far from mature.

Coming of age, whether for the individual or for a society, implies a declaration of independence. In one country after another the external props that supported religion in the past are being removed. Ever since the Emperor Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire in the fourth century of our era it had been assumed that the church and the state were to work in close alliance. For centuries in most Western countries Christianity was the established religion; that is, one particular church was the religious body recognized by rulers of the state. After the Reformation Western Europe was divided into Protestant and Roman Catholic regions; in Eastern Europe the Orthodox Church was officially sanctioned. When the United States came into being there was a notable change in this pattern, since our Constitution forbids any establishment of religion. Yet here too until recent years Protestantism was in effect the favored religious body.

But now in country after country the churches are being deprived of their political support, and Christianity is rapidly becoming a minority movement in an increasingly secular society. Pluralism is becoming the accepted pattern; that is, all religious groups are attaining equality before the law and in public opinion. Martin Marty declares that religious plu-

ralism has displaced "Protestantdom" in the United States. "Ordinarily, 'pluralism' means nothing more than the ground rules: any number can play in America."³

In Asia and the Middle East we are witnessing a resurgence of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. Minority Christian groups are no longer in a favored position. This explains in part the revolutionary changes that have taken place in Ceylon, the United Arab Republic, and South Vietnam. Enlightened Christian leaders in Asia welcome the establishment of a secular state guaranteeing equal treatment of all religious bodies. In areas where communism is dominant, the state is aggressively nonreligious and Christianity is engaged in a struggle for survival.

But this increasingly sharp separation between church and state is only one aspect of the world's coming of age. There has been a declaration of independence from religion also in the physical and social sciences. Theology was once regarded as "the queen of the sciences." In the Western world Christian faith was widely accepted as a frame of reference for scientific thinking and ethical theory. But in recent decades each field of knowledge has claimed autonomy. No longer is it customary to use God as a working hypothesis for various systems of knowledge. Physicists can deal with their data in operational terms with little or no regard to whether the universe is a machine or an expression of divine energy. Psychologists can devote their efforts to empirical knowledge about concrete mental disorders without affirming or denying the existence of a soul. Economists are absorbed with the mechanisms of production and distribution and find little time or need for postulates about the nature of man and his ultimate destiny. The prevailing mood of our technological age is practical, problem solving, ignoring for all practical purposes metaphysical questions.

The arts—music, drama, literature, architecture—are also asserting their autonomy. They are no longer commonly regarded as the handmaidens of religion. Nevertheless—and this is a clue to the more positive aspects of the present scene

to which we shall come presently—the arts have become effective media for expressing man's deepest concerns. More insight into the Christian answer to man's search for meaning is likely to be forthcoming from current "secular" films or dramas than from the Hollywood versions of the biblical story.

There has been a widespread tendency to think of God largely in terms of the crises of life, especially in times of danger or guilt, or in terms of thus far unknown areas of human knowledge. Bonhoeffer referred to these as the "borders of human existence" and he pointed out that those who would relegate God to these boundary situations are likely today to find his domain more and more restricted. Unless God can be found at the center of existence and in the rough and tumble of daily experience, religious faith will become increasingly a rarity, an option for the few.

In short, in our day we cannot expect Christianity to be propped up by legislative decree. Nor can we assume that Christian faith will be corroborated by all competent scientists. The great majority of people as they go about their daily pursuits make decisions primarily in accordance with the standards and assumptions of this age. This is the essence of secularism. There are no sure supports for religion in modern culture. Christians are on their own in a world come of age.

RELIGION-IN-GENERAL IN AMERICA

But is this analysis really true to the American situation? Visitors who come to this country are impressed by the large numbers of Americans who go to church regularly. In many places in Europe and the United Kingdom, even though a large proportion of the people are baptized Christians, only a small percentage will be found in the churches on Sundays, except on festal occasions. But keen observers of the American scene are aware that beneath the surface of an apparent religious revival is a dominant secular mood.

33 The most penetrating study of this unusual phenomenon has

been made by Will Herberg, a Jewish layman equally at home among social scientists or in the theological classroom. His essay in American religious sociology, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*,⁴ presents a very sobering analysis.

Almost everyone in the United States—about 95 per cent according to questionnaires reported by Herberg—identifies himself with one of the three prevailing religious communities which are popularly but inaccurately called “faiths.” Almost all profess a belief in God, prayer, and life after death. Yet when they were asked, “Would you say your religious beliefs have any effect on your ideas of politics and business?”, only about 40 per cent answered in the affirmative. And when it comes to knowledge of basic biblical facts it is obvious that the religion which actually prevails among Americans today is notably lacking in authentic Christian—or Jewish—content.

The conclusion that Herberg and others draw is that “religion” in the United States is a part of the prevailing culture pattern of the American way of life. Even though there is a great diversity of denominations, and though tensions arise frequently between members of various religious groups, there is a remarkable acceptance of religion-in-general as a “good thing.” Professed atheists and outspoken critics of religion are in a very small minority. This prevailing American faith has sometimes been called the Religion of Democracy. It is regarded as a unifying force for the common good. In the interest of national unity specific theological distinctions are pushed into the background. Former President Eisenhower once referred to it as “a very fervent faith in a very vague religion.” Even though in theory church and state are separate, in practice religion is established securely in American society and is taken for granted as an important institution.

In many ways this religious pluralism marks an advance over an earlier period when both Catholics and Jews existed as minority groups in a predominantly Protestant nation. Now all these communities enjoy equal status as the three

"religions of democracy," and Eastern Orthodoxy is rapidly approaching a similar status in some parts of the country. Here is a framework in which men of diverse religious backgrounds can work together as Americans and be assured of fair representation in national and local enterprises. Yet, as Herberg points out, this acceptance of religion-in-general as a part of the American way of life leads to ambiguity and a dimming of the prophetic spirit of both Christianity and Judaism. The result all too often is "a religiousness with almost any kind of content or none, a way of sociability or 'belonging' rather than a way of reorienting life to God." The distinctive witness of each of the three communions is subdued in the interest of harmony. There is a grave danger of identifying religion with American culture instead of recognizing the Christian faith as a basis for judging all nations and cultures.

Here then is a paradox: American life is becoming more secular at the very time when religion seems to be flourishing. It might be appropriate to call this American phenomenon "religiosity" rather than true religion in the Christian or Jewish tradition. A summary paragraph from Professor Herberg's book states this contrast clearly:

The American is a religious man, and in many cases personally humble and conscientious. But religion as he understands it is not something that makes for humility or the uneasy conscience: it is something that reassures him about the essential rightness of everything American, his nation, his culture, and himself; something that validates his goals and his ideals instead of calling them into question; something that enhances his self-regard instead of challenging it; something that feeds his self-sufficiency instead of shattering it; something that offers him salvation on easy terms instead of demanding repentance and a broken heart. Because it does all these things, his religion, however sincere and well-meant, is ultimately vitiated by a strong and pervasive idolatrous element.⁵

A NEW OPPORTUNITY FOR CHRISTIAN FAITH

35 We have tried in a few pages to give the briefest possible sketch of the religious situation today, particularly in the

United States. To some this will appear to be an unduly pessimistic outlook. But the intent has been not to cast doubt on our Christian faith but to clear away the underbrush and the lush foliage which have often obscured that faith. Rightly viewed, this frank portrayal of secular trends points the way to a new opportunity for churches and Christian Associations today to bear effective witness to the true gospel. Among the last words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer from prison were these penetrating comments:

Man's religiosity makes him look in his distress to the power of God in the world. . . . The Bible however directs him to the powerlessness and suffering of God. . . . To this extent we may say that the process we have described by which the world came of age was an abandonment of a false conception of God and a clearing of the decks for the God of the Bible. . . . Now that it has come of age, the world is more godless, and perhaps it is for that very reason nearer to God than ever before.⁶

The faith of the Old Testament was never religion-in-general. It was faith rooted in a particular community. It was based first on a covenant relationship between the God of all nations and a people especially chosen to hear his word and obey it, not for their own sake but as a "light to the Gentiles." These people had only brief periods of national glory and economic security; for the most part they were nomads, vassals, and exiles. Then God established a new covenant through One who "made himself nothing," revealed perfectly in human form the will of God, and died on a cross. After his resurrection a New Community was formed. Its members now became the "people of God" to live in the world and to bear witness to his love to the ends of the earth.

The biblical faith has never been a comfortable faith, although it has brought inward peace to countless persons. In its name prophets have dared to rebuke kings, and humble people have found strength to stand up against emperors. To be a nation "under God" is far different from calling on God to bless the nation in all its endeavors. To seek peace of mind without recognizing the need for one's

mind to be transformed is a perversion of the gospel. Religion in this sense has often been an enemy of faith. It was the religious people of Jesus' day who were least responsive to his announcement of the Good News. Charles West has put this issue very sharply:

The gospel — that is, the good news of God, about what he has done for the world in Christ — is not the same thing as religion. It not only does not depend on religion but may even run counter to it. For religion is the sum total of all those practices, ideas, and feelings whereby we human beings try to connect ourselves with God. It can include our daily discipline of prayer, if we have one, or our weekly attendance at church, along with all our other pious habits. It can include the way we express our beliefs. . . . But all of these actions, beliefs and feelings are after all things which WE do. . . . The first thing God asks of us is not to be religious but to hear what HE has done for his world and to obey him by sharing in what he is doing today and tomorrow.⁷

Are we to conclude, then, that the day of religion is over? It is quite possible to draw a circle around a particular phase of human thought or activity and call it "religious," referring to belief in a Supreme Being and the desire to maintain a right relationship to him. There can be little doubt, in view of the widespread secularism of our day and the aggressive atheism which prevails in some areas of the world, that a smaller proportion of people are religious in this strict sense than ever before. Furthermore, religion-in-general is no guarantee of good will toward men. The devils believe in God and tremble, declared the writer of the Epistle of James, yet this awe does not lead them to right action. But Paul Tillich defines religion as "the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern," a deep-seated search for the meaning of existence. If this be our norm perhaps there never was a time when people were more religious than today, whether or not they accept this designation. From the standpoint of Christian faith, religion must never be restricted to one compartment of life or one dimension of reality. The Old Testament prophets declared that God is not interested in solemn

assemblies unless they are accompanied by justice toward fellow men. God is not interested in religion in the narrow sense, for he is the Lord of the whole of life.

Let no one conclude that a reappraisal of the place of religion in the world today will lead to writing off the Church. There are many in the United States who acknowledge that churches are a good institution but have no real understanding of the place of the Church in Christian faith. There are others, especially undergraduates, who are interested academically in religion but are impatient with religious institutions. The call to Christian discipleship, however, is also a call to fellowship within a Christian community. However impatient and disappointed one may be about a particular local congregation, every person who accepts the name of Christian is obligated to be a faithful member of the Body of Christ.

Moral and religious discipline has an essential place in the life of children and youth. But there comes a time when the one who has been under guardians from birth attains his full status as a son. Just so, says the Apostle Paul, a mature Christian is set free through Jesus Christ from all external regulations. This is what it means to be "beyond religion." The Christian who has come of age finds his freedom not in doing as he pleases but in complete allegiance to the Lord of life.

Moreover, if we are to have a positive approach to the secular trend of our times there must be a realistic understanding of the "world." In the New Testament the present age is sometimes depicted as infected with evil; those who would follow Christ are not to become attached to this world and its pleasures. But over and over again in the Old and New Testaments God is proclaimed as the Creator of this world and all that is in it. He "loved the world so much that he gave his only Son . . . not to judge the world, but that through him the world might be saved."⁸ From this perspective, that which is secular is not so much a godless sector of life as the temporal world in need of God's re-

demptive love. Thus the coming of Christ into the world can be called a secular event, an event in and for the world. And the place where he can best be met and served, according to the parable of the sheep and the goats, is where men are hungry, ill, in prison, or otherwise in need. It is in this world, at home and abroad, that the Young Men's Christian Association is called to work and to witness.

THE "IMAGE" OF THE AMERICAN YMCA

In this ambiguous social and religious setting, with elements of both threat and promise for Christian faith, what is the position and the opportunity of the Young Men's Christian Association? This is the basic question to which this book is addressed, and the chapters that follow will deal with different aspects of the present YMCA situation one by one. It is in order at this point to record only a few general comments about the cultural orientation of YMCAs in the United States. The overworked term "image" seems peculiarly appropriate in this context, since it suggests that the YMCA is to a large extent a reflection of the prevailing culture.

From 1961 to 1963 the National Council of YMCAs engaged in a process of re-examining the Christian character and objectives of the YMCA movement in the United States. "How do we understand the religious element in the YMCA?" was one of the questions in a nation-wide inquiry to local Associations and individual leaders. The replies showed that YMCAs are deeply affected by the religion-in-general which has become so prevalent in this country.

Some of those who replied felt that the YMCA could make a comfortable adjustment to the growing pluralism in American life. "The stated purpose of our Association is purposely worded so as to allow all religions, including the Jews, to be able to accept and live comfortably within the stated YMCA purpose and yet not detract from the basic faith and purpose of any." A few were content to see the YMCA give little emphasis to religion, considered in its narrower sense.

"Religion is a minor portion of the YMCA now and should remain that way. . . . Stressing religion introduces a divisive element into the movement."

But many of those who responded to this inquiry were disturbed by current trends and determined to clarify the Christian purpose of the YMCA:

The specific nature of the religious element in the YMCA today is vague, ill-defined and practically meaningless to the general public.

Explicitly Christian motivations or commitments are not really required or expected anywhere in the actual operation of most Associations. The word "Christian" has been so broadly interpreted by our Associations that it now means anyone of good will.

The image of the YMCA is presently so hazy and confused by lack of common purpose and by multiplicity of programs that it is impossible to launch a massive effort of rededication to our fine stated objectives.

Such comments underline the questions raised in our introductory chapter when American YMCAs were described as inclusively Christian, broadly religious, and socially neutral. But they are by no means the whole story. There are also positive elements in the YMCA situation in the United States which must be taken into account by those who seek to re-examine its role today. It is such positive aspects of the YMCA image that led members of the National Council to reaffirm the Christian basis of the YMCA and at the same time to restate the bearing of this Christian purpose on program and membership policy.

Paradoxical as it may seem, one of the elements of strength in the situation of the American YMCA today is its secular orientation. YMCAs are very much "in the world." The basketball floor and the swimming pool are part of the real world of youth in leisure hours. So are the dormitory and the summer camp. Evening classes provide for self-improvement and vocational preparation. The YMCA has not fled from the inner city with its racial tensions and its juvenile delinquency. YMCAs may be noisy and plebeian, but they

are beehives of activity in which young and old are happily and wholesomely engaged in things which absorb their real interest. Here individuals gather without regard to religious affiliation yet in an atmosphere conducive to friendly human relationships. The emphasis is primarily on meeting needs rather than promoting a religious institution.

Those who know how to approach the counseling of individuals informally and yet within the perspective of Christian faith—or within the framework of the Judeo-Christian tradition—will find in the YMCA a remarkable opportunity. Those who are concerned about overcoming limited concepts of religion and helping young men to be Christians “in the sphere of their daily calling” will find as much challenge in the Associations of America today as in the London YMCA of 1844. Our YMCAs need not take on completely the color of their surroundings, giving in to the forces of secularization. They can continue to function vitally as Christian Associations—if they know how to take advantage of their position in the world.

This point was made forcefully by a young Indian Christian, C. I. Itty, formerly a YMCA secretary, in his opening address at the meeting of the World Council of YMCAs in Geneva in 1961:

The period of Christendom has come to an end. The Western society is fast becoming a secularized society. The Christian community has become a minority. . . . Often one hears church people criticize the YMCA by saying that YMCAs have lost their Christian character and have become more or less a secular organization. It is quite possible there is some truth in it. But I am one who believes that many of these critics speak from a wrong understanding of the Christian faith and the Christian mission. . . . What is required at the present time is not a rediscovery of the “religious” character of the YMCA but a reaffirmation of the truly secular character of the YMCA, as a movement of the People of God in the world and for the world.

Let us confess that the popular image of the American YMCA reflects to a large degree the confused pattern of social and religious life and thought in the United States today. But let us at the same time register the conviction that our YMCAs can become a truer mirror of the Christ whose name they bear.

THE AGE OF THE LAITY

The fact that the YMCA is a *lay* movement is one of its greatest assets in a secularized society. We are witnessing today a fresh understanding of the role of Christian laymen, which if really followed through would bring about revolutionary changes in our churches. This is not a novel idea for the YMCA. Thirty years ago John R. Mott, who insisted on retaining his lay status in the church, was writing about *Liberating the Lay Forces of Christianity*. Yet most YMCA leaders in the United States are not fully aware of this strong current in present-day Christian thought, nor have they come to the point of facing squarely the implications for the Young Men's Christian Association. It is appropriate, therefore, to review a few of the most provocative statements that are being made about the "age of the laity."

Hans-Ruedi Weber of Switzerland, who has done as much as any person to interpret to the churches of the world the true role of the laity, has contrasted the outlook of Dietrich Bonhoeffer with that of John Bunyan. Here are two men writing from prison, one in the seventeenth century and the other in the twentieth. John Bunyan in his *Pilgrim's Progress* depicted the struggle of a godly man to be liberated from this evil world in order after many trials to come into the presence of God. Seldom in his writings is any reference made to the social and political struggle of his day. Bonhoeffer, on the other hand, writing from Nazi prison, was led by his commitment to Christ into increasing preoccupation with secular affairs. "It is only by living completely in this world that one learns to believe," he wrote. Weber calls laymen "salty Christians" because of their intimate although

unspectacular involvement in the world, and refers to their mission as one of "holy worldliness."⁹

George Webber, one of the leaders in the pioneering work of the East Harlem Parish in New York City, regards the layman as the real frontiersman in establishing "God's colony" in man's world. The term layman is associated usually with the activity of an amateur, one who has only a smattering of knowledge in comparison with the professional. But when it comes to involvement in the day-to-day work of the world with all its moral ambiguities and hazards, it is the ordained minister who is the amateur and the layman who is called to be the expert.

The work of the ordained clergy is within the life of the church for the sake of the world, while the work of the laity is primarily in the world for the sake of the church. . . . When the laity of a local church come to understand their task in relation to that of the ordained clergy, then they become colonists, not as second-rate assistants to the professionals but as those rightly called by God to serve as his witnesses in the world.¹⁰

Many voices, both Protestant and Catholic, are calling for a new strategy for the Church in the light of this fresh insight into the true ministry of the whole people of God. Laymen spoke to the Assembly of the World Council of Churches at New Delhi (1961) as follows: "Christ is not imprisoned in our churches. Christ is *incognito* already present in the structures and power systems in which we have to live our Christian life." This is an echo of an earlier statement from the World Council's meeting at Evanston in 1954:

The real battles of faith today are being fought in factories, shops, offices and farms, in political parties and government agencies, in countless homes, in the press, radio and television, in the relationship of nations. Very often it is said that the Church should "go into these spheres," but the fact is that the Church is already in these spheres in the persons of its laity.

43 No one has dealt with this new strategy of the Church from a Catholic point of view more forcefully than Father

Jacques Leclercq, professor at the University of Louvain in Belgium. He quotes with approval the definition of a layman as "a man who takes the temporal order seriously." As an example, a pork butcher would not be taking his secular occupation seriously if he were to establish a shop primarily to speak to people about religion, but only if he wishes to sell good products and to improve the diet of people in the neighborhood. "So long as priests continue to believe that they must concern themselves with the temporal order and laymen continue to believe that they must seek holiness in the imitation of the religious, the Church will not accomplish her work. . . . The priest should form the layman; the layman should transform the world. . . . The virtue of Christianity will either be manifested to the world by the Christian layman or it will not be made manifest at all."¹¹

The YMCA is one of the best-known and most widely recognized expressions of the lay forces of Christianity. It provides a medium through which lay members from many churches can take leadership in the community. In one sense it is an auxiliary of the Church, but it enjoys an independence which enables it to operate free from ecclesiastical control. Yet it is fair to say that most of the adult members and leaders of the YMCA understand only dimly what it means for laymen to live and work as Christians on those frontiers where the Church meets the world. To a considerable extent the YMCA is still one of the undeveloped resources of the total Christian enterprise. It is not enough to point with pride to the pioneering role which the YMCA and the YWCA once played in the ecumenical movement. How to function effectively as a lay Christian movement in the present fluid situation in America is a major question to which the best minds of both churches and Christian Associations are beginning to give serious attention.

Notes for Chapter 2

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² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Prisoner for God* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1957), pp. 156, 157. By permission.

³ Martin E. Marty, *Second Chance for American Protestants* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1963), p. 72.

⁴ (New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1955).

⁵ Will Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*, p. 285. Copyright © 1955, 1960 by Will Herberg. Reprinted by permission of Doubleday & Company, Inc.

⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Prisoner for God* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1957), pp. 164, 167. By permission.

⁷ Charles C. West, *Outside the Camp*, p. 70. Copyright © 1959 by Charles C. West. Reprinted by permission of Doubleday & Company, Inc.

⁸ John 3: 16, 17 (NEB).

⁹ Hans-Ruedi Weber, *Salty Christians* (New York: Seabury Press, Inc., 1963).

¹⁰ George W. Webber, *God's Colony in Man's World* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1960), p. 134.

¹¹ From *Christians in the World* by Jacques Leclercq, © Geoffrey Chapman Ltd., 1961, Published by Sheed & Ward, Inc., New York. Pp. 62, 67, 71.

**New Perspectives
in Working with Persons**

All this talk about frontier situations and a world come of age is in danger of being very abstract until we come down to earth by dealing concretely with persons. What is happening to the individual in this kind of world? How can one learn to live under the terrifying tensions of an age in technological revolution and social ferment? Particularly, what does it mean to be a Christian at such a time? Only as we face these questions shall we be prepared to deal realistically with new perspectives for a Christian Association as it works with individuals and groups.

WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE ARE UP AGAINST TODAY

The focus of the Young Men's Christian Association has been on youth. Those who read the statistics of YMCA membership may challenge this statement, since according to 1962 figures 24 per cent of the members of the YMCAs of the United States are under 12 years of age and 37.5 per cent are 30 years old or over. But in its essential genius the YMCA has been a movement primarily for teen-age youth and young adults, including college and university students. Unless the YMCA is oriented largely to the interests, needs, and concerns of persons in their formative years, it loses much of its reason for being.

Studies of the experiences of children, teen-age youth, and young adults in the modern world are being made by the score. Some of these are the result of painstaking research; others reflect varying social philosophies and ethical theories. It is much easier to write about coming of age in Samoa or some other relatively simple society fifty years ago than to figure out what it means for a young person to come to maturity in present-day America. And yet anyone who undertakes to work with youth must find his way through this maze of material to discover the most pertinent clues to the dynamics of personal growth and interpersonal relationships in this kind of world. We shall have occasion in later chapters to deal more concretely with the crisis in

morals which is so much talked about today. But these acts of rebellion and irresponsibility are symptoms of deeper conflicts. We are seeking here to identify some of the main cross currents around the person growing up in America today.

One of these cross currents has to do with the *status of youth*, their attempt to figure out their own position in society. Adolescence has always been an in-between period; the teen-ager is too old to be a boy and too young to be a man. But this uncertainty regarding status is accentuated today in various ways. From the economic standpoint young people in America are a surplus commodity. During summer vacations or after leaving school they are likely to swell the ranks of the unemployed. For many the result is a feeling of not being really needed or wanted. If one happens to be born a person of color, the chance of being unemployed is two or three times greater and the sense of being unwanted is immeasurably deepened. One university professor in speaking to a group of educators declared: "Lacking any important role or function, youth face the problem of growing up in exile." This is much less true of those who have a well-defined occupational and educational objective, but even here the long years of preparation often seem tedious, a marking of time until one can do what he really wants to do. A period of required military training is a further unwelcome detour.

There are other forces, however, which speed the adolescent toward a too early maturity. There is a clear and disturbing trend toward earlier marriages. In 1961 it was reported that 40 per cent of all brides in the United States were of teen age. Today one out of four college students in this country is married. The age of dating and going steady is being pushed lower and lower. This phenomenon is partly an unconscious assertion of independence on the part of young people, a desire to be more free of parental control. But it is the result sometimes of pressure from parents who encourage a hothouse social development of their children.

And certainly it is one result of the blaring emphasis on sex in present-day American society.

Related to this ambiguity on the part of youth with regard to their status is the strong urge toward togetherness. Not knowing quite where they stand in relation to the outside world, they are determined to stand firmly together. It is nothing new for the teen-ager to form clubs or gangs, but this natural tendency has been accentuated by the insecurities of modern life. By clinging together in their own groups young people are of course giving expression to the general trend toward conformity in American society, as reflected in frequent references to the "organization man" and the "other-directed" personality. If this togetherness were to imply an outgoing concern for others or a deepening of wholesome personal relationships, it would be a great asset for Christian education; but all too often it is an expression of basic insecurity and an escape from personal responsibility.

Another cross current to which youth and young adults are being subjected in our times centers around *motivation*. In a report on education and the future sponsored by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund the point is made that the current stress on the citizen as consumer is a threat to the growth of mature and socially minded citizens. The dominant emphasis in advertising is on self-gratification. One is urged to look for milder cigarettes, softer mattresses, easier-driving cars. "If his dollars are to continue flowing, he must be endlessly catered to, soothed, anointed, protected, healed, cajoled, and generally babied." This "cult of easiness" is deplored as a wholly inadequate guide to the deeper springs of human action.

What most people, young or old, want is not merely security or comfort or luxury—although they are glad enough to have these. They want meaning in their lives. If their era and their culture and their leaders do not or can not offer them great meanings, great objectives, great convictions, then they will settle for shallow and

trivial meanings. . . . People who live aimlessly, who allow the search for meaning in their lives to be satisfied by shoddy and meretricious experiences have simply not been stirred by any alternative meanings, ethical values, ideals of social and civic responsibility, high standards of self-realization.¹

Here again we have conflicting reports about American youth. One study of the values of college youth in ten countries reported by Prof. Gordon Allport draws the sobering conclusion: "In comparison with youth of other nations, young Americans are delightfully frank and open. But within these ten nations American students were the most self-centered, the most 'privatistic' in values. They desired above all else a rich, full life for themselves, and showed little concern for national welfare or for the fate of mankind at large." This report is corroborated by other studies showing that the expectations of the present generation for the future center largely around a secure job and comfortable living. Yet there is increasing evidence also that under certain circumstances young men and women respond to calls for unremunerative service at home or overseas, whether through international work camps, the Peace Corps, or other concrete projects. This generation of youth is less likely to be swayed by idealistic slogans, but underneath the mask of being "cool" there is often a deep desire to throw oneself into an enterprise that seems significant in a down-to-earth fashion.

THE CHRISTIAN APPROACH TO MORAL CONFUSION

A striking article in a popular magazine on the low state of morality in the United States came to the conclusion that we need "new standards that will enable us to live morally and decently," and that we should "grope for a new moral code." It is our conviction as Christians that what we need most is not a new code but a clearer apprehension of the way of life already proclaimed in the gospel. The Christian faith has an answer to the perplexities of a youth caught in the cross currents of modern society. Those who would be

leaders of youth must themselves be sure of this answer and must seek constantly to be more effective in communicating with young people at the point of their deepest interest and need.

The answer of the Christian, however, to the current moral confusion is not an easy one and it offers no short cuts. Exhortation is not enough. Young people will not stand still long enough to be preached at by adults who do not understand the pressures to which they are being subjected. The Christian perspective throws doubt on the moralistic approach which is characteristic of many current efforts of churches and YMCAs. A list of things to do and not to do, a series of ideals or traits to be developed, may be a useful instrument in bringing a description of the Christian way of living down out of the clouds of generality. But anyone who relies on this as his chief guide is missing the main point of the Christian approach to the good life. Robert Spike has warned of the puzzling questions that confront us "when we attempt to erect papier-mâché dummies of the good man in the display windows of Christendom."

The core of the Christian ethic is a call to freedom and to the responsibility that flows from it. Some will say that we already have too much freedom, that young people and their elders today are all too ready to throw off all restraints: but this reaction reflects a superficial concept of freedom.

- *Freedom for the Christian, for one thing, is to learn to enjoy what God has created and to use to the full those capacities with which he has endowed us.* The Christian way is not an ascetic path, avoiding all pleasures. The body is a "temple of the Holy Spirit" to be used, not tortured or abused. Material things are indispensable, and personal possessions have their rightful place—as long as they do not become our chief treasure. Talents of mind and money are to be invested, not kept under wraps. Sex adds joy and depth to life when used for the purpose it is intended rather than for entertainment or exploitation. Part of the score of

life's symphony is written in a minor key of failure and pain, but the dominant note for the Christian should be one of joy, with a sense of freedom in a world which God has created.

- *But freedom for the Christian is the result of discipline.* The athlete achieves maximum use of his body only when every nerve or muscle is trained to respond and is strained to full capacity. Discipline from the Christian standpoint is inherent in discipleship. It is the well-regulated way of living which we undergo as learners of the truth of God as revealed in Christ, who came "that men may have life and may have it in all its fullness." The pianist has to warm up with five-finger exercises before he can run freely over the keys; so there are basic laws of the mind and spirit to be obeyed before one can feel free from external restraints. But these exercises must be seen within a context of freedom; otherwise they become dull routine. "To walk by the Spirit" is to put oneself under a spiritual discipline which bears fruit in a full and free life.

- *Christian freedom must always be seen within a context of love.* There is a special kind of discipline which arises from the fact that human beings are set in families and groups and communities. An indispensable part of Christian freedom is a recognition that we are members one of another, obligated to respect the rights of others and to have a genuine regard for the dignity of other human beings, whatever their nationality, race, or social status. For the Christian there is basically only one law for human relationship, but that is the all-embracing law of love—not sentimental affection but a persistent concern for the well-being of others.

This kind of freedom in a Christian perspective is in sharp contrast to the term as popularly used. There is much talk, for instance, about "free love." But anyone who squanders his birthright of sexual desire for immediate enjoyment regardless of consequences may soon be caught up in all kinds of anxieties and regrets. That person is anything but

free, and how often there is the longing to retrace one's steps and start over.

What does it mean to be really free in racial relationships? It means to be able to deal with persons freely without the artificial barrier of color of the skin, to be relieved of inherited prejudices. Many of us long for the time when our communities and our YMCA fellowship can be freed from this nagging problem, able to go about our business without being besieged on every hand by protest marches and deep personal tensions.

FREEDOM AND CHRISTIAN FAITH

Above all, the Christian is free from inner anxiety about himself and his destiny, and this is a word that speaks particularly to restless youth. To the Christian, God is not a distant manipulator of cosmic affairs but is made real and personal in Jesus of Nazareth. Through this Person in whom God was made manifest uniquely, one can gain full status as a person. This status cannot be earned; it is a free gift to anyone who responds in faith to God's gracious initiative. In this relationship one becomes a "new creature." One's outward appearance is not changed, and the problems which he faces may not melt away; but inwardly there will be a joy, a release from anxiety which makes all the difference in the world.

Attention is now drawn away from one's own anxieties and uncertainties. The youth no longer keeps feeling his spiritual pulse to ask, "How am I doing?", but focuses on the larger scene: "What is there for me to do?" The "religious" question of a man's destiny in this world and the next is now set aside in the light of the gospel. Robert Spike, addressing the North American Association of YMCA Secretaries in 1960, put it this way:

To be a Christian in any age, and this one is no exception, is to be fully a man—a creature of God, not infallible, not isolated and sterilized by your religion, but responding as a whole being to the times and the people among whom one is set. It means further

responding as one who has been freed by Jesus Christ to take a chance, to be experimental, to laugh at fate and cry with compassion, to work and play: in short, to be a new creature, born of a new birth.²

This makes clearer what Dietrich Bonhoeffer meant by worldliness: "taking life in one's stride, with all its duties and problems, its successes and failures, its experiences and helplessness. . . . That is faith and that is what makes a man and a Christian."³

But if this revolutionary emphasis on freedom were to be interpreted in a purely individualistic manner, it would put a young man or woman in an exceedingly lonely position. After he is restored to the family fellowship by the grace of a prodigal Father—that is, a God whose love is given unsparingly—he still has to go on living in a world where there are other sons, some wayward and some unlovable. Is there no place he can look for help in making decisions? If he is entirely on his own, his newly found freedom may appear unbearable. Here again the answer of the New Testament is clear. The Christian is called to freedom within a community; he has at hand all the resources of the Christian *koinonia*, which for want of a better English word is translated "fellowship."

The follower of Jesus Christ is not only a new man: he is a member of a new community, the "people of God." And there is a style of life appropriate to this fellowship, which began with the ushering in of God's kingdom at a decisive moment of history. Within this circle of fellow disciples there is a discipline which does not depend on the customs and morals of the day, although it is always in danger of being molded by them. This new life of freedom carries its own distinctive responsibilities. It is this combination of Christian freedom and responsibility by which the modern youth is challenged as he wavers between conformity and rebellion.

YMCA GOALS IN WORKING WITH PERSONS: A CRITIQUE

This may seem like a long introduction to the practical concerns of those who are seeking to re-examine the program of the YMCA in the light of its Christian purpose and heritage. But it is necessary to recall these basic elements of the Christian faith against the background of the current perplexities of youth if there is to be any probing beneath the surface of conventional approaches. Certain crucial questions such as the nature of the Church and the approach of Christians to persons of other faiths will be considered in later chapters, as well as the whole problem of the role of the Christian and the Christian Association in dealing with controversial social issues. Our attention at this point will be centered on the kind of experience under guidance which YMCA leaders can provide for individuals and groups if they are alert to the anxieties and aspirations of youth growing up in America today, and if they are prepared to make the Christian faith relevant to these basic human concerns.

It is exceedingly difficult to translate the call to freedom and responsibility, which is at the heart of Christian discipleship, into YMCA goals in working with persons. How can we be true to insights from our Christian faith about ways of transforming human nature and at the same time be fair to the diverse religious concepts and backgrounds of our constituency? How can such goals be made relevant to different stages of human experience from childhood to adult life? How can we formulate general objectives and still take into account the pressing needs of our times? It is no wonder that critical questions can be raised about every one of the formulations now in general use among American YMCAs.

National Council Statements. In 1931 the old Portland Test of 1869 was superseded by a much simpler formulation which with minor changes was incorporated later into the constitution of the National Council as its official statement of purpose. This was reaffirmed in 1963.

The Young Men's Christian Association we regard as being in its essential genius a world-wide fellowship united by a common loyalty to Jesus Christ for the purpose of developing Christian personality and building a Christian society.

The intent of the familiar phrase "developing Christian personality" is clear. The YMCA seeks to help individuals grow "in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man" along lines taught by Jesus of Nazareth and exemplified in his own life. This development in turn is based on convictions about God and his will for men. It implies a quality of character which cannot be achieved by human effort alone but is a response to God's gracious initiative. The term "personality" in itself is vague and lacking in ethical content unless seen in the context of Christian faith. There are "plus" elements here, which go beyond character education as ordinarily conceived. "Developing Christian personality" is like a shorthand symbol which must be spelled out for the YMCA leader if it is to have meaning in relation to specific decisions in daily experience.

One step toward making this general goal more concrete is illustrated in an earlier statement by the National Council ("The YMCA in the American Community," 1957) which declares that one purpose of the YMCA is "to extend the challenge of Christian faith and bring Christian standards to bear on all aspects of life." This is similar to the objective of the National Council of YMCAs of England in its youth work: "To meet the needs of youth and in so doing present the claims of the Christian faith."

Another approach is to be found in a later paragraph of the National Council statement of 1963:

In giving effect to our Christian ideals and values, our Associations offer to the men, women, boys, and girls who participate in their programs opportunities for experiences that will help them

- **to develop self-confidence and self-respect and an appreciation of their own worth as individuals**

- to develop a faith for daily living based upon the teachings of Jesus, that they may thereby be helped in achieving their highest potential as children of God
- to grow as responsible members of their families and citizens of their communities
- to appreciate that health of mind and body is a sacred gift and that physical fitness and mental well-being are conditions to be achieved and maintained
- to recognize the worth of all persons, and to work for interracial and intergroup understanding
- to develop a sense of world-mindedness, and to work for world-wide understanding
- to develop their capacities for leadership and use them responsibly in their own groups and in community life.

Most of these goals would be recognized as desirable by youth leaders of all religious affiliations. But the second of these seven program objectives gives a clue to the distinctive approach of a Christian Association, provided this is regarded not as merely one item in a list but as a basic and all-inclusive goal affecting all other attitudes and relationships. Once a personal relationship to God as revealed in Jesus Christ is established, as suggested earlier in this chapter, a foundation is laid for all the understandings and responsibilities listed here, and more.

The Triangle. The best-known symbol of the American YMCA is the equilateral triangle which expresses the conviction that body and mind are inseparably related to spirit. This concept has been of incalculable value in making clear that the YMCA is not interested in "religion" as one compartment of life but in the whole person. It has been particularly important in giving validity and dignity to sports and recreational activities which used to be held in low repute by both churchmen and educators. But often this symbol of the triangle has been interpreted in a way that leads to the departmentalization of program rather than to its integra-

tion. The term "spirit" as used by the Greeks referred to the emotional or spirited part of human nature, not to the *psyche* or soul. Too often in YMCA practice the "spiritual" has been interpreted in a way quite contrary to New Testament concepts as if it denoted a religious side of life which could be dealt with separately. What Christian faith calls for is not a well-rounded personality as such, which might be purely self-centered as it often was with the ancient Greeks, but the dedication of the whole being in service to God and man. On the exterior of the beautiful YMCA of Milwaukee is the inscription which everyone who enters can read: "Body, Mind and Spirit Dedicated to God's Purposes as Exemplified in the Life of Christ." Here is a true interpretation of the triangle in the context of Christian faith.

Winning Young Men to Christ. The central purpose of the YMCA used to be stated quite directly as winning boys and young men to Jesus Christ. Many present leaders of the YMCA would say that they are in basic agreement with this aim, but that these words too require reinterpretation for modern youth. A forceful statement of this historic objective was made by the Twenty-first World's Conference at Mysore, India, in 1937: "The central task of the YMCA is to make Jesus Christ known, believed, trusted, loved, served, and exemplified in every life and in all human relationships." This ringing declaration with its simplicity and warmth has something to say to Association leaders who are timid about making an explicit affirmation of Christian purpose. We must make sure, however, that winning persons for Christ is not conceived in purely sentimental or pietistic terms. The blond Jesus with Nordic features who is pictured on the walls of many YMCAs is a pale copy of the young bearded Jewish carpenter who made prophetic announcements in Galilee or the resolute critic who seemed so dangerous to the religious elite of Jerusalem. Writes Roger Shinn: "The conventional Christ has little to say to the teen-ager in his self-awakening and his bursting vitalities. He has little to say to the engineer or the industrialist. Christian education must

somehow let the attractive vitality of Christ break through."⁴

On the whole, it must be said that the YMCAs of the United States have had difficulty in recent years in stating their goals for persons in ways that reflect clearly the Christian traditions of the movement. They are far more adept in dealing with processes than with purposes. They are more resourceful in developing effective means of work than in defining the ends of their endeavor. This ambiguity about goals is due often to the failure to put solid content into the term "Christian," but also to a reluctance to be explicit about the Christian objectives of a movement that includes persons of diverse religious affiliations.

CASE STUDIES OF YMCA PROGRAM

In a later chapter we shall examine in some detail new perspectives on character education and at that time deal with some of the "plus" elements in a Christian approach to individuals and groups. But it may be helpful to pause at this point for a few illustrations of how a leader might proceed in specific aspects of a YMCA program if he is true to the genius of a lay Christian movement.

- *Hi-Y Club.* A few years ago a keen high school student who was president of the National Hi-Y Congress wrote to an older adviser: "It's hard to explain to my high school faculty the difference between a dance put on by my Hi-Y Club and one put on by the Letterman's Club to which I belong. It hardly seems adequate to say merely that ours in Hi-Y is a more Christian dance." Drawing on the Christian perspective in working with persons which we have been considering, what can we say to the student leader? The first thing to note is that this activity is sponsored by a group of young people belonging to a national Hi-Y movement with the purpose "to create, maintain, and extend throughout the school and community high standards of Christian character." Therefore this event should be planned carefully by a committee of youth in consultation with a volunteer leader, usually a teacher in the school, and under the general super-

vision of a YMCA secretary. Among the questions that could appropriately be raised with the planning group are the following:

- **Who shall be included? Shall this be a dance by invitation only or open to all? Class distinction or segregation in one form or another is likely to exist in the community. Here is an opportunity to face in a concrete situation what it means to be Christian in relation to persons of other social and racial backgrounds.**
- **How can a wholesome atmosphere be assured? Here there will be questions of the type of dancing, perhaps of safeguards against drinking, and of other factors which determine the tone of a dance.**
- **How can widespread participation be encouraged? Provision may be made for "mixers" and a varied program which will attract persons of limited dancing skills. Perhaps some folk and square dancing will assure a good time for all. Hopefully, it would not be a conventional dance where the same couples stay together all evening.**
- **In some settings there may be a prior question whether any dance should be held under Christian auspices. The view of some conservative groups that regard all dancing as evil must be taken into account. The committee will then have to consider whether this objection is based on a narrow moralism or on unfortunate experiences with an undisciplined, low-level type of dance.**

The role of the Christian leader clearly is to help a group of young people think through the purposes of this particular activity and plan for the greatest possible enrichment of experience through the event. The criterion of success will be, it is hoped, not making money or building up the prestige of the club but what happens to persons in and through this activity. The right kind of dance may make an important contribution to wholesome other-sex relationships. It may help shy individuals to become more at ease in social contacts. It may strengthen a sense of social responsibility, par-

ticularly on the part of the committee. Furthermore, the leader through this planning experience will be in a better position to counsel with boys or girls who are emotionally insecure or lacking in sensitivity to the needs and attitudes of others. The decisive point is not to pin a Christian label on a social event but to bring all the insights and resources of the Christian faith to bear upon a concrete "slice" of youth activity.

- *Physical Education Committee:* More young people and adults become related to the YMCA through an interest in sports and physical education than for any other single reason. One could list an impressive array of activities which may be engaged in under YMCA auspices, from learn-to-swim campaigns for youngsters through team sports and tournaments for youth to health and fitness programs for adults. For purpose of illustration we shall focus attention here on young adults and ask, as in the case of the Hi-Y dance, how a YMCA program in health and physical education may differ from that of an ordinary sports club. Let us again take our place among the members of the committee who are trying to plan and interpret this program in a Christian perspective with the aid of a trained YMCA secretary. Questions such as the following need to be raised:

- **Whom are we trying to reach through this program? The fee for membership will doubtless be a selective factor, since facilities for health and physical education are expensive and the program of a voluntary organization must be largely self-supporting. But at least it will be necessary to decide whether there shall be an open door for young men of all occupations, all faiths, all races. Here is or ought to be one crucial difference between a YMCA and a private sports club, which is usually exclusive in its clientele.**
- **How can the specific needs and interests of individuals be met? The committee will have to consider setting up a physical examination upon entrance, with expert advice on a suitable regimen of exercise and information about the range of avail-**

able activities. There should be team competition for men with advanced skills, but the primary objective will be not to produce a winning team but to provide opportunity for persons with widely varying skills to enjoy the game and develop physically. Some will be interested chiefly in recreational games like tennis and badminton, some in gymnastic exercises, others in strenuous body building with weights.

- How can the care and development of the body be seen in wider perspective? Here the concept of total fitness is pertinent, relating soundness of body to health of mind and seeing the challenge for physical vigor in relation to fitness for living in a world of emotional tension and ethical confusion. Pride in self-development will shade into the background as one becomes interested in taking his place in the community and nation. Strength of body will then be needed not for display but for daily tasks. An occasion may arise for explaining the emphasis in the letters of Paul on disciplining the body for higher ends. For the apostle the "body" was practically equivalent to the whole being, thus anticipating modern psychosomatic concepts.
- The language used in locker rooms and even in sports competition sometimes is shockingly inconsistent with the purpose of a Christian Association. A basic solution will not be found by posting rules on a bulletin board but through patient but firm action on the part of members of the Physical Department who are determined to establish higher standards.

Here again the leader who sees any activity as an opportunity for rewarding personal contacts will make the most of the intimate human relationships on the gymnasium floor and in the locker room. Thereby he will gain the confidence of individuals and encourage them to share with him some of their anxieties and aspirations. Often situations which seem very indirectly related to "religious" matters prove to give direct access to conversations of deep significance.

- *Personal Counseling.* Our last illustration is not so much a case study as a review of an important aspect of the YMCA leader's role as he works with persons. This is commonly called *counseling*. Too often this is regarded in YMCA cir-

cles as a specialized function reserved for experts or a type of technical service possible only in larger Associations. Usually it is identified with advice on choosing an occupation and selecting a college, or with straightening out juvenile delinquents. But Christian counseling — *Seelsorge* in German — has a much broader connotation; it really means “care for the whole person.” Its chief characteristic is a willingness to enter into dialogue with an individual on matters of serious concern to him. Its first step is listening rather than telling. It aims for a real meeting of minds out of which can come insights that are new to both parties in the conversation. Counseling from the Christian standpoint is based on a genuine respect for each individual and a desire to be a medium through which the truth of the gospel can be communicated in a concrete situation.

The YMCA provides almost unlimited occasions for counseling to those who are alert to the opportunity. Young people are constantly being both stimulated and baffled by the friendships they form within the Y. They have to make choices among the many YMCA activities. They are called on to carry responsibilities that sometimes seem beyond their capacity. And occasionally, at quiet times in camp or after a meeting in the building, they are ready to “open up” to an older person whom they trust. Most of the distinctively Christian elements of the YMCA program referred to throughout this chapter can become a reality only through person-to-person counseling. The point is not to set up a counseling center in or alongside the YMCA but to regard the Christian Association itself as a center for counseling. Professional skill in this field should of course be used as widely as possible.

Professor Seward Hiltner has suggested that the leisure-time interests of an individual give the YMCA a special channel of access. Although the Christian Association leader is rightly concerned about the whole person, he ought to be an expert in the use of leisure time, or what some prefer to call “off-the-job-living.” Dr. Hiltner proposes that the

contribution of the YMCA at this point might well be called *appraisal services*, a somewhat more modest term than counseling. The leader may help individuals and groups to re-examine their personal values and goals: "What do you really want to do with your life, particularly in those hours when you are free to do as you wish?" In a day when occupations for youth are becoming more limited and less flexible and leisure time is becoming more abundant, this kind of creative appraisal has great possibilities. If the YMCA can in this way capture the interest of teen-age young people, many of whom are suffering from boredom, it will indeed be working in a frontier situation.

FITNESS FOR FRONTIER LIVING

Young people of our generation are destined to live in a world where old standards are losing their force and new ones have not yet been widely accepted. Some say we need a new form of "living ethics" for our day. The Christian faith is highly relevant for times like these. It calls men to a combination of freedom and responsibility as disciples of One in whom the love of God was expressed completely. Here is a style of living appropriate to a frontier situation.

In World War II the reconnaissance troops in Europe, although still called "cavalry," operated in armored tanks. It was their job to probe into no-man's land to see where the enemy were actually located and how great was their strength. These small units had a great deal of freedom; no officer could expect orders from headquarters. Yet if a tank ventured too far and was isolated from the rest of the division, it was almost certain to be captured. This was an exploratory maneuver calling for a combination of individual daring and the accumulated wisdom of map reading and military training. Is this not a parable for those who are seeking to be responsible Christians amid the shifting frontiers of modern life?

How to translate this call into terms that youth will understand is the task of any movement that bears the name Chris-

tian. Too often the YMCAs, as well as the churches, have failed to make this connection clear. But there are "plus" elements in work with youth which can be the distinctive mark of a Christian Association. Within the varied program activities of the local YMCA we have sought some concrete clues to fulfilling this basic obligation to help make youth fit for frontier living.

A comment from the secretary of a Student YMCA may serve as the central emphasis of this chapter: "We should emphasize loving relationships instead of moralistic proclamations. . . . We should keep before us a goal of providing an island of stability in a sea of confusion, a place of acceptance in a world of loneliness, a moment of meaning in a time of meaninglessness."

Notes for Chapter 3

¹ From *The Pursuit of Excellence: Education and the Future of America*. Copyright © 1958 by Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Inc. (As it appears in *Prospect for America*, copyright © 1961.) Reprinted by permission of Doubleday & Company, Inc.

² Robert W. Spike, *To Be a Man* (New York: Association Press, 1961), p. 32.

³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

⁴ Roger L. Shinn, *The Educational Mission of Our Church* (Boston and Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1962), p. 61.

We are born one at a time, suffer one at a time, find or fail to find meaning one at a time, die one at a time. In the midst of these swirling revolutions the person cannot exist in a vacuum. He has to make some kind of response. One description of our age is "the age of anxiety," and probably the central reason for this anxiety is man's present inability to respond creatively in this revolutionary age. Feeling the impact of revolution upon him, experiencing the death of old meanings and the failure to find adequate new ones, he represses his fears and loses himself in great busyness.¹

66

A Lay Christian Movement

4

in Action on Social Frontiers

To provide an "island of stability" for individuals amid the cross currents of modern life is a valid and attractive aim as far as it goes, but we are being reminded on every hand that "no man is an island." The focus of the YMCA's attention is on persons, particularly in their formative years, but a person is an individual-in-society. To be a Christian in a world come of age is being interpreted as a combination of freedom and responsibility. When we turn, therefore, to a consideration of the role of a lay Christian movement in preparing persons to take their place as responsible citizens in present-day society, we are not moving to a separate or secondary topic but are dealing with the same basic theme in a larger social perspective. Any sharp distinction between a personal and a social gospel is artificial; there is one gospel for the whole person. The Christian faith lays claim upon an individual in all his relationships.

Furthermore, the Young Men's Christian Association, whatever else it may be, is a social institution. It exists in a particular community and is involved in responsible relationships in that community. Inevitably it reflects to a considerable extent the dominant social attitudes and patterns of its environment. If its members and leaders take their Christian purpose seriously, they will experience the tensions that arise from living in a society that at many points falls far short of Christian standards of justice and love. Many of these leaders will share the uneasiness expressed by an Ohio industrialist in response to the National Council inquiry in 1961:

The YMCA typically has a good camp and physical recreation program, informal education, and social programs. But it treads lightly—often oh so lightly—over the great issues in our economic, political, and social life. Yet the religious basis of YMCA work means that Christianity's message should permeate all that we do.

DILEMMAS REGARDING CHRISTIAN SOCIAL ACTION

Before we can suggest with any assurance how American YMCAs can face creatively the problems and opportunities

that are inherent in their involvement in society it is necessary to examine more closely some of the dilemmas which confront Christians in the modern world. We cannot be content with time-honored formulas which seem too simple for present-day complexities.

Here again young people are caught in cross currents that make it very difficult for them to know how to act as responsible citizens. Often, particularly in Western countries, they are criticized as being indifferent to larger social issues. They show little enthusiasm about lectures arranged for them by their elders. They are allergic to idealistic speeches by commencement orators. They are said to be interested in jobs that promise security rather than in taking risks in private enterprise. Their chief expressed aim is to marry and settle down. In a recent YMCA study of young adults about 98 per cent said that they were not involved in community affairs. Many said that they come to the YMCA for fun and want to take as little responsibility as possible.

In the less politically developed countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America young people are likely to exhibit much more concern about community and national affairs. This has become strikingly true also of young Negroes in the United States and of a minority of white youth, especially college and university students. But then they are likely to be criticized for being naive and irresponsible. In some countries it is evident that young people are an easy prey to left-wing agitators. Sometimes they strike out in ways that are close to rioting and vandalism. In the United States those who engage in strikes and sit-in protests are still regarded in some quarters as misguided trouble makers. Here is another instance of the youth of our generation being caught between conformity and rebellion.

The dilemma of youth is more understandable when seen against the background of the various pressures to which Christianity has been subjected over the years by men of the world. Often churches have been under pressure to support

and sanction the goals of the nation. This has meant in effect that the state has sought to use religion to serve its ends rather than welcoming the prophetic insights of the Judeo-Christian tradition. A universal faith is thus domesticated to feel at home in the national culture. This is not usually the work of wicked men; it is a reflection of a human weakness to attempt to get God on our side rather than to re-examine our goals to see whether we are on God's side. A second type of pressure, used particularly in totalitarian states, is to tolerate organized religion as long as it stays in its place. And that is a minor place. The churches are limited to the strictly "religious" activities of liturgy and learning with strict orders not to interfere in social and political matters.

We need not look across the waters for illustrations. In the United States there is constant danger, as we saw in Chapter 2, that our churches and synagogues will be expected to give uncritical support to the American way of life. On the other hand, when a group of churchmen in a national conference see merit in admitting the People's Republic of China to the United Nations, or when some clergymen speak out frankly against segregation and join in protest marches, many will rise up to say that they are acting outside the proper sphere of religion. This situation led Dr. Eugene Carson Blake, Stated Clerk of the United Presbyterian Church, to declare: "Those who are pressing the church to keep out of economic and political areas, whether they know it or not, are attempting to make in this country a tame, kept church such as all totalitarian states attempt." In other words, organized religion also is caught between the twin pressures of conformity and rebellion. We should not be surprised, therefore, that young people find it hard to know what kind of social responsibility is expected of a Christian.

PROPHETIC VOICE AND PRECARIOUS VISION

The message of the Old Testament and the New is clear enough; our difficulty is to translate these insights into con-

crete terms today. The prophetic voice in Israel could never be silenced by kings or priests. King David, the most successful ruler in Hebrew history, became humble before the prophet Nathan when he rebuked the king for taking another man's wife and declared bluntly, "Thou art the man." Amos was chased away from Bethel, the chief place of worship of the Northern Kingdom, but not before he proclaimed God's judgment on the nation because of social injustice. Two centuries later Jeremiah took his stand in the court of the temple to declare that the people had failed to "execute justice one with another"; not only had they gone after other gods, but they had tried to use their God instead of obeying him.

Jesus drew upon this prophetic tradition time and again, both in sorrow and in indignation. He was put to death because he was a threat to the established religion and an embarrassment to the occupying political power. And those who spoke in his name were constantly in danger. In Thessalonica members of the new Christian congregation were dragged before magistrates with the cry, "The men who have made trouble all over the world have now come here."

But no matter how willing thoughtful Christians may be to accept the challenge of this prophetic tradition and recognize in principle that the duty of the church is to transform the world rather than be conformed to it, they will still be hard pressed to decide exactly what kind of action is appropriate for Christians in specific situations. This arises to a large extent from the complexities of the problems themselves. Consider, for example, the current debate about the use of nuclear weapons. A publication of the Board for Social Responsibility of the Church of England, entitled *Modern War: What can Christians do together?* lists points of agreement and disagreement and outlines a possible common program for Christians. There are technical questions here which baffle even the experts. In 1962 the

National Council of Churches in the United States sponsored a conference dealing with The Church and Economic Life and presented its findings in a pamphlet, *The Church in a World That Won't Hold Still*. Even though there is a large measure of consensus among Protestants and Catholics on social questions of this kind, obviously no group of Christians can claim to have the answer on specific issues. The most baffling question of all confronting American Christians today centers around the struggle against racial discrimination, with which we shall deal in some detail later. These illustrations and many others that could be cited give point to a declaration by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. in 1955:

It must be said that there is no single straight line running directly from the Gospel to a Christian position on many of the complicated issues of our day. Of only a few political and social issues can it be said that there is clearly but one Christian position. On many other matters divergent Christian views are possible.

Peter Berger's suggestive term "precarious vision" may serve as a clue to what Christian faith has to say about social action not only in our complex society but in any age. It is Berger's thesis that one must not expect to find in Christianity a new moral system. "The Christian life is not obedience to a new law, but a living out of God's law in faith, which makes it possible freely to seek moral solutions to the ever-new problems that face us."² Since man is justified by grace in the real world in the "middle of the village," as Bonhoeffer put it — he can dispense with "the narcotic of ideology." Thus the Christian rejects the ideology of the conservative, because he sees through the social fictions by which the status quo is rationalized. But he also rejects the utopianism of the revolutionary, because he cannot accept his unrealistic hopes for the future. In some concrete situations the decisions of the Christian may be labeled conservative, and in other situations liberal. One of the urgent tasks

of the church today is to provide places of truth, "places where men can think through in freedom the moral and human dilemmas of their social roles."³

This interaction between two apparently contradictory forms of Christian responsibility is expressed clearly by Professor Roger Shinn under the caption, "Boldness and Restraint." The social witness of Christians calls for a continuous interplay between biblical faith and the most modern scientific understanding. The churches must listen to the findings of social scientists, but always in faithfulness to the Lord of the whole of life. One will find in the Bible a basic understanding of his responsibility to God and neighbor, but he must not expect to find there a modern political and economic program. The conclusion, however, is not that the churches should avoid controversial issues. "The answer is to undertake the discipline of understanding the gospel and the world; then to act with both the boldness of Christian disciples and the restraint of men who know they can err."⁴

Obviously, the decisions which Christians are called upon to make in particular social situations are not usually black-and-white choices. Baffling as this may seem to those who are looking for simple answers, for the Christian it may lead to an enduring hope. The Christian faith gives us courage to live responsibly, even though we have only "proximate solutions to insoluble problems." Professor Masao Takenaka, who is dealing constantly with problems of Christian social ethics in a predominantly Buddhist society, writes: "As salt functions when put into soup, so the Christian can bear witness through his wrestling presence in the concrete social context. This is his invitation to participate in Christ's costly ministry."⁵

HOW YMCAs APPROACH SOCIAL QUESTIONS

73 How do YMCAs characteristically deal with the type of complex social issues which we have been considering?

How do they conceive of their role in preparing youth to take their place as responsible citizens in society as it exists today? Here, as in the preceding chapter, we shall review official statements of purpose and policy and then give some specific illustrations of the YMCA's approach to education for social responsibility.

National Council Statements. "United by a common loyalty to Jesus Christ for the purpose of . . . building a Christian society." This statement of purpose in the constitution of the National Council of YMCAs reflects the hope of the 1920s and 1930s that the institutions of society could be reconstructed quite concretely on the basis of the teachings of Jesus. Today, after a second world war and a series of setbacks in the pursuit of internal concord and international peace, there is much less optimism about human efforts to build a Christian society. We are acutely aware also that sincere Christians differ sharply among themselves about the kind of society that could truly be called Christian. We are much more cautious about referring to any country, including our own, as a Christian nation, both because we accept religious pluralism as a reality and because we know that every political state falls far short of exemplifying Christian standards.

Here again the intent of the National Council statement of purpose, reaffirmed in 1963, is clear. The YMCA seeks to develop a society based on Christian values: respect for persons, freedom and justice for all, equality of educational opportunity, the elimination of poverty and disease, and so on. As Christians we express our earnest desire to work with persons of other faiths in changing the social structures of our nation and the whole world in ways which we believe to be in accord with the will of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. Any brief statement of purpose about social change must be seen in the deeper context of Christian faith if it is to be more than an oversimplified slogan.

Again it is helpful to turn to the later paragraph of the National Council statement, quoted in the preceding chapter, which calls for types of YMCA program that will help youth to grow as responsible citizens, to work for interracial and intergroup understanding, and to develop a sense of world-mindedness. Here are more specific clues to what is involved in "building a Christian society." But again realistic YMCA leaders acknowledge how far we have to go before these worthy objectives are translated into concrete terms that will take into account the complex decisions facing a Christian in modern life.

The National Council has been forthright in advocacy of free inquiry and discussion of social issues. There have been periodic reaffirmations of the policy adopted in 1931 of maintaining an open platform in YMCAs, "on which may be discussed all questions affecting the economic, social, political and spiritual welfare of the community and the world." This was expressed with special clarity in a 1954 resolution: "The National Council records the conviction that it is part of the responsibility of YMCAs to foster freedom of inquiry and discussion, to stimulate and aid their members in the study of social, political, and economic issues in the light of Christian faith and principles, and to encourage their members in the performance of their duties as citizens." Reference will be made later in this chapter to current efforts to implement this policy in the realm of racial relationships.

YMCA Projects in Educating for Social Responsibility. One of the promising efforts to stimulate YMCAs to deal vigorously with concrete social problems in the community and the nation is the Dynamic Citizenship Program which is being undertaken in a number of cities. For example, in the spring of 1963 the Philadelphia YMCA enlisted the co-operation of twenty five other organizations in sponsoring a series of weekly discussions. Substantial source material was provided for leaders. The objective of such a program is "to

provide a channel through which individuals will be helped to see their responsibility and opportunity in shaping the events of our time." Active involvement in the problems of the community is encouraged. Another program which has met with considerable success is the Y-Votercade, a project of young adults directed toward debating basic issues in national elections and getting out the vote.

The most extensive nation-wide enterprise devoted to realistic understanding of citizenship is the Hi-Y Youth and Government Program. This is being carried on under YMCA auspices in thirty-seven states and has been in existence in some states for twenty-five years. The climax each year is a week end at the state capitol. Some excerpts from a report by the youth editor of a St. Louis newspaper, the observations of an outsider, will serve to indicate the potential value of such an experience:

Three hundred and sixty young people from all parts of the state were in Jefferson City April 5 and 6 to participate in the 14th annual Model General Assembly of the YMCA's Youth and Government Program. . . . Speaking as an observer, the performance of these boys and girls would have restored the faith in youth's most severe critics. Their participation had only one purpose—to learn the exact procedure used in our democratic system of government. . . . Do you question what they could possibly learn about government in just two days? But it was not just a two-day training session. It was the culmination of months of concerted work on the local level. . . . Some members prepared bills several months ago, with the assistance of local attorneys. . . . The youths either changed a present law or through extensive research prepared a bill based on their own original ideas. . . .

You should have been there Saturday afternoon when the bill on discrimination in the sale or rental of residential property on the basis of race, color or religion was being discussed on the floor of the Senate. The previous day it had lost the battle before that body, but it was returned after being passed by the House. A lively discussion was taking place as this reporter entered the chamber. A girl . . . brought the debate to a close in these few

words and contributed to the passing of the bill: "It's vitally important that we go on record as supporting this bill. . . . We all know that the YMCA stands for brotherhood among men. It must not be defeated." These were words from a girl who publicly acknowledged a change from her original vote.

Remarks such as these were heard between sessions: "Boy, I sure didn't know until I got here what one-sided feelings I had on most political ideas. . . ." "If I didn't learn another thing, I found out about what used to be an unknown—the government. I'm not afraid of it anymore. People like you and me can fight for our rights."⁶

Over the years many Student YMCAs have been centers for vigorous study and action on social issues. Sometimes they have embarrassed the parent movement by their willingness to espouse unpopular causes. But almost invariably they have commanded respect because their social concern has been an expression of a growing understanding of Christian faith. Their social action is not divorced from study and worship. Frequently the program on campus and the inspiration of regional and national conferences have led students to participate in interracial projects, to give a year of voluntary service overseas, and in other ways to get involved in responsible social action as a result of their Christian commitment.

Various forms of service in the community stemming from the YMCA represent a less spectacular but very real kind of Christian involvement in society. All too often YMCA members are absorbed in fun and fitness for themselves. They are consumers, buyers of privileges. A major task of the leader is to move these participants out of their self-centeredness. Too often the YMCA is labeled a youth-serving agency, whereas its true role is to draw young people into the giving of service. Most YMCAs are not notably successful in fulfilling this task. They take pride in the YMCA's service to the community in general terms, but show no great ingenuity in enlisting young people and adults in forms of

service outside the institution itself. Projects in World Service are perhaps the most noteworthy illustration of the potential within the YMCA membership waiting to be mobilized. These and other aspects of the international dimension of the American YMCAs as part of a world movement will be considered in a later chapter.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Enough has been said to indicate some of the most important resources at the disposal of YMCA leaders who are reasonably alert to the role of a lay Christian movement in modern society, both in equipping its members to play a responsible part in the world and in recognizing its own wider responsibilities as a social institution. But our chief concern is to point to unfinished tasks and largely unexplored opportunities which confront a Christian Association when it becomes more fully aware of the frontier situation in which it is placed today.

It must be admitted, first of all, that relatively few persons through their experience in the YMCA are aroused to a vital social concern. Special seminars or forums on social questions usually attract those already interested and are bypassed by the great majority of members. All too seldom do leaders realize that service and social action are inevitable expressions of a genuine "loyalty to Jesus Christ"; they cannot be added as an optional activity or regarded as a hobby for the few. The dimension of "Christian citizenship" should be a factor in all personal counseling that has a Christian basis and all group work with a Christian orientation. Hi-Y Clubs come closer to operating on this principle than other units in the city Associations. Industrial Management Clubs, Y's Men's Clubs and other programs with young adults show encouraging signs of moving in this direction. The Student YMCAs provide one of the best illustrations of a special concern inherent in the normal program. But in the many

area and national YMCA gatherings which this writer attended in the spring and summer of 1963 seldom did he note any spark of serious concern about the responsibility of YMCAs in dealing with the critical social issues of the day.

Even when a social concern is in evidence in YMCA circles, it is too seldom a conscious expression of Christian conviction. Not often enough does one find a recognition of the agonizing dilemmas, referred to earlier in this chapter, which confront the person who hears the prophetic voice of the Old and New Testaments but is enmeshed in a society which at many points falls far short of elementary justice and mercy. Simple humanitarian impulses are by no means to be discounted, but they do not provide the basis for an enduring witness under pressure. Many American YMCA leaders would say Amen to an observation by M. M. Thomas of India, Director of the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, about the task of the YMCA in today's world: "No secular human service can endure without understanding man and his world in the light of the gospel of Christ. . . . The recovery of its faith and purpose in Christ is essential for the continuance of the YMCA's contribution to personal and community building."⁷ The sporadic expression and anemic quality of much of the YMCA's witness in society can be explained by the lack of deep rooting in an authentic Christian basis for action.

It may also be questioned whether many YMCAs in the United States have developed a social philosophy which is adequate for a lay Christian movement in our revolutionary era. Occasionally the National Council has made its point of view articulate. For example, in 1938 it declared: "Because of its interest in youth and in Christian objectives for living, the Young Men's Christian Association finds itself necessarily concerned with social, economic, civic, and international policies that affect the future of youth." But on the whole both the national body and local Associations have

been hesitant to carry out concretely the implications of such a statement. This reluctance is due in part to the difficulty of getting agreement on what shall be said or done about controversial racial and political questions. But it arises also from a point of view on morality which lacks a clear social dimension. M. M. Thomas, dealing with the YMCA's role in an Indian setting, says:

The YMCA has a task not only to provide a genuine concern for persons in an atomized society, but also to build the structure of a new society and culture, which will provide a human habitation for persons. The YMCA has the task of participating in community service in a way relevant to the nation's search in rural and urban areas for new patterns of community.⁸

Granted that the primary concern of the YMCA is with the development of individuals, it cannot escape also a share of responsibility for changing social structures. We may profitably heed the words of Father Jacques Leclercq of Belgium. Although he is well aware that the improvement of social institutions is not a final answer, he declares that Christian virtue is too often confined to personal morality:

The good Christian in question does not concern himself with the social structures which make respect for the rule of morality difficult or impossible for certain people. . . . This individual charity is quite different from the social action which tends to reform the social structures in such a way that there are no longer any poor. . . . All this enables us to understand how certain people who have a highly developed sense of personal values come in the end to have a systematic repugnance for everything institutional.⁹

It may be that the YMCA movement, because of its broad-based constituency which includes persons of many different points of view, can have limited influence in direct social action. But the YMCA is made up of individuals who wield great influence in their various occupations and in community life. The question is whether through their experi-

ence in the YMCA these men are being awakened to a keener sense of social responsibility in daily life and whether their YMCA relationship tends to make them more forthright advocates of the changing of present-day social structures in keeping with the prayer which we repeat so often, "Thy will be done on earth as in heaven." There is evidence that this really happens, but many would say that it does not happen often enough or consistently enough. For it is in the areas where these young men and adults live and work outside the YMCA that day-to-day decisions for or against freedom, justice, and good social order are shaped.

RACIAL RELATIONSHIPS IN THE UNITED STATES: A CASE STUDY

It is time now to test these generalizations by a case study of a concrete situation. The current struggle in the United States centering around the rights and privileges of Negroes is beyond doubt the most pressing social and political problem in America today. Here is an instance, it would seem, where there should be little ambiguity in principle about the position of the Christian and the Christian Association with regard to attitude or action. To work for the blotting out of discrimination would appear to be the elementary duty of citizens of a nation which guarantees in its Constitution equal rights and opportunities. To be unfailingly on the side of fair treatment for every individual, regardless of color or racial origin, would seem to be the ABC of obedience to the biblical injunction to love one's neighbor as oneself. How then can it be, as the late President John F. Kennedy declared in June, 1963, that this nation is confronted by a moral issue of the first magnitude?

For months in 1963, the newspapers were filled with stories of tragic events in Alabama and Mississippi; accounts of protest marches in Northern cities against discrimination in jobs and *de facto* segregation in schools; the fate of civil rights legislation in Congress; the memorable March on

Washington; and the pros and cons of nonviolent sit-in and sit-down techniques as compared with the slower processes of legislation and negotiation. Before moving to a consideration of what YMCAs are doing or not doing in the midst of this crisis, it is important that we identify the sources of resistance on the part of white people, North and South, so that we may see clearly what the Christian forces are up against.

There are, as always, *economic* factors. Those who have jobs in a society where there are not enough to go around want to hold on to their jobs; white workers have tended to set up restrictions against Negroes. When people of color move into a residential neighborhood it is feared that the value of real estate will go down; hence those who hold property in more favored sections of the city tend to oppose renting or selling to Negroes.

There are powerful *political* factors that support resistance to desegregation. In places where Negroes make up a large part of the population, there is fear of what will happen if the Negro gets a vote. In the South, which has been suffering ever since the Civil War under a sense of a minority status within the nation, the doctrine of states' rights is held in exaggerated form and interference from outside is resented.

But the basic element in the resistance of white folk to desegregation is *cultural*. There is a deep-seated feeling, backed often by dubious statistics, that there are inherent limitations in the black race which endanger the attainments of an Anglo-Saxon civilization. If Negro children become numerous in schools and colleges, it is feared that educational standards will be lowered. If Negroes are admitted to social equality, it is feared that there may be a mingling of the races in marriage to the detriment of the "pure" stock. This point is put very boldly by spokesmen for the Citizens Councils of the South, which are pledged to uphold white supremacy. "Of all the races that have been on this earth,"

says Judge Tom P. Brady, "the Negro race is the only race that lacked mental ability and the imagination to put its dreams, hopes and thoughts in writing." The Reverend G. T. Gillespie of Mississippi declares that segregationist views are expressions of race pride, which he regards as "one of the mightiest forces making for human happiness and progress." Many whites who would reject such statements as extreme nevertheless have an inner conviction that somehow the Negro is a threat to our American culture unless kept in his "place."

To these rather obvious factors which help to explain the resistance of the dominant group to full freedom and justice for the Negro, there are more subtle *psychological* elements. One is an underestimation of the emotional side of human nature. So often it is assumed that desegregation can be accomplished solely through persuasion and appeals to reason. Education is regarded by many as the only answer in the long run. But man's prejudice is so deep-seated that it can never be eradicated by information alone. Only a change of heart will suffice. A recognition of the powerful emotional forces which are inherent in human relationships is essential if one is to understand why pressure tactics must go hand in hand with efforts to persuade.

Only those who are realistic about human nature and sensitive to the spirit of man are equipped to understand the mood of the "new Negro," which is radically different from the more docile and patient attitude which was characteristic of Negroes a generation ago. What they want now is not charity but justice, not concessions but recognition. A well-known Negro lawyer put it this way in an interview: "The Negro wants to be accepted now as a man, completely, in our American society. He wants to be able to walk down the street as if a big burden had been relieved from him."

On the other hand, Negroes who take their Christian responsibility seriously are also keenly aware of difficulties to

be faced realistically within their own group. Sometimes there is a failure to take full advantage of the opportunities which are already open to them. In striving for the rights due them as American citizens there is not always the acceptance by Negroes of the responsibilities that accompany these rights. Members of a disadvantaged minority group face a long uphill struggle of educational effort and moral discipline. And in the heat of conflict there is the constant temptation toward bitterness and retaliation. In other words, both white people and Negroes find it exceedingly difficult to know what Christian love demands in concrete situations and how to act resolutely in accordance with this imperative.

From the standpoint of Christian faith and prophetic Judaism the various forms of resistance in the face of segregation are nothing new. They reflect the age-old human sins of pride and anxiety, devils that can be cast out only by the Spirit of God. And it is abundantly clear from both the Christian and the Jewish traditions what is required of man—plain respect for all persons, regardless of race, as men made in the image of God. It was only after a special vision that Peter, confronted by an invitation from a Roman centurion to come into his house, could say: "I now see how true it is that God has no favorites, but that in every nation the man who is god-fearing and does what is right is acceptable to him."¹⁰ Rabbi Abraham Heschel, in addressing a National Conference on Religion and Race in January, 1963, put it very bluntly:

Wherever you see a trace of man, there is the presence of God. . . . To be arrogant toward man is to be blasphemous toward God. . . . How can I withhold from others what does not belong to me? . . . This is not a white man's world. This is not a colored man's world. No man has a place in this world who tries to keep another man in his place.¹¹

An increasing number of men born in the South and steeped in Southern culture see the present race issue in its true dimensions. One is James Sellers, a young theological

professor who was born in Mississippi and resided for some years in Florida. He maintains that the chief block for white Southerners is lack of appreciation of the scope and power of the revolt of the Negroes, a delay in apprehending reality that tries to defer the inevitable. He quotes a South Carolinian: "Segregation is dead. It's gone, but they won't believe it down here. . . . What we must do now is find a way to replace a way of life that is gone." Sellers maintains that desegregation is the essential first step but by no means the ultimate goal:

Desegregation is coming; that is not a debatable point any more. But working out an ethic of "men living together" means far more than devising the end of segregation. It means taking up the decidedly theological question of how men living in a hard and practical world may inwardly become neighbors.¹²

Learning to live together is a voluntary matter; it cannot be legislated. Genuine communication between men, as Sellers points out, does not take place "until the parties stand before each other as full-fledged human beings." Desegregation is the demand of justice, the first mile. Integration is the application of love to human relations, the second mile. Both are frontiers in American society where churches and Christian Associations that take their faith seriously are fully involved. But the failure of organized Christianity in the United States and elsewhere to give a clear witness in deed as well as in word has prompted Martin Luther King to ask: "Is organized religion too inextricably bound to the status quo to save our nation and the world?"¹³

RACE RELATIONS AND THE YMCA

Turning now to the position of YMCAs with regard to this crucial question of the place of the Negro in American life, we find a baffling mixture of high purpose and disappointing fulfillment. As early as 1910 the YMCAs of the United States and Canada went on record "urging all Associations to take

definite steps toward the goal of making possible full participation in the Association program without discrimination as to race, color, or nationality." After World War I, YMCA leaders — notably Will Alexander and Willis D. Weatherford — took the initiative in setting up Interracial Committees throughout the South. In 1954 the National Council of YMCAs called upon all Member Associations "earnestly to work toward the elimination of segregation and other forms of racial discrimination by dealing with this matter frankly, courageously, and with a real sense of urgency . . . recognizing fully that the Young Men's Christian Associations have the responsibility to furnish leadership and example in Christian action."

Meanwhile a Commission on Interracial Policies and Program of the YMCA had been established in 1950. This body has frequently brought to the attention of the movement both progress and failure in the field. This Commission reported in 1963 that there is a serious lag in converting announced objectives into concrete realities. In spite of many encouraging moves by local Associations, changes in racial practice have been distressingly slow in comparison with the changing climate in the country as a whole. The Commission pointed out that at least 23 per cent of the 1761 Associations still practice racial segregation with respect to membership and access to facilities. In many of the cities where these YMCAs are located, desegregation in public schools, playgrounds, and restaurants is already under way. The Commission declares that the YMCA movement needs to accelerate its efforts in line with current nation-wide changes. "The entire movement must be committed to a nonsegregated YMCA, lest it find itself in an intolerable position as a Christian movement of failing to keep pace with other organizations in interracial advancement."

Yet those who know the YMCA situation from the inside are aware that there is a positive side to the picture. Illustra-

tions could be given of communities in the South as well as the North where YMCA leaders have worked quietly behind the scenes to keep open the lines of communication between representatives of the two races and to prepare the way for changes in social patterns and attitudes. For decades YMCAs have provided the kind of experience for Negro youth in clubs and committees which has enabled them even under adverse conditions to develop the leadership which may now exert a steadying influence amid community tensions. In most sections of the country there is a firm agreement that area or national YMCA gatherings will be held only in places where all participants can meet without barriers because of race. And occasionally there is a breakthrough in local situations on the basis of Christian conviction. In one strategic city south of the Mason and Dixon Line, for example, the coming of a new general secretary made it possible to mobilize support for a change in racial policy. In a crucial meeting on the issue several board members said in effect: "My whole pattern of living and that of my friends is against this motion, but I am going to vote for it because this is a *Christian Association*."

For three years Dr. Thornton W. Merriam was engaged by the Southern Area Council of YMCAs in a Leadership Development Project, charged with facing the realities of Negro-white relationships within the YMCAs of the area. A digest from Dr. Merriam's recommendations provides the best analysis to date of the unique problems and opportunities with which YMCAs are confronted today:

- YMCAs have a built-in challenge to take leadership on the resolution of racial misunderstandings and conflict. They have a Negro constituency and a white constituency and an ever-pressing challenge "that they all may be one." Race is "homework" for the YMCA. There is no way under the sun by which a YMCA can avoid involvement in the current con-

flict. Many have thought in terms of keeping things in bounds rather than of doing the right thing as a Christian Association. To continue along this line will be very costly for the future of the YMCA. Here is the greatest spiritual challenge of our times. We find schism within the soul, a conflict between the ethical imperative of the YMCA's Christian commitment and deeply ingrained habits of thinking and acting. If there is to be progress, there must be change in the hearts of men.

- The problem of Negro-white relations in a YMCA is not exactly like that of many other organizations. It is different in some respects from that of a church, a public school, a department store. It puts stress on the responsibilities of the members of each local Association to determine their own policies. Its program typically calls for close interaction between people, often involving some of the most sensitive areas of human relations. Therefore the role of the YMCA is somewhat different from that of many other religious and social organizations. There are some things it can do well; there are other things which it ought not to attempt.

- The dominating need of the present hour in the YMCAs of the South is for high-level dialogue, the meeting of minds on basic issues. A policy of keeping things quiet and avoiding discussion of controversial issues is ill-advised. There can be no progress until "both sides" are required to think about their position in the light of the ethical commitments which are basic in a YMCA orientation. Our white leaders should more often take advantage of the exceptional opportunities for communication which YMCAs offer. If the YMCA could do no more than develop mutual respect and confidence in an increasing number of community leaders, white and Negro, it would contribute an ingredient of inestimable worth in the present crisis-situation. The YMCA must set up its own dialogue on race. It cannot rely entirely on the

results of dialogues sponsored by other groups in the hope that some of the insights will brush off on us.

So far, Merriam. Keeping in mind our earlier distinction between segregation and integration, we venture to identify three very concrete areas of action on the racial frontier which could apply to YMCAs in all parts of the country:

- **To adopt a clear policy of desegregation in all matters within the YMCA's own control: membership, club and sports activities, facilities for lodging and eating;**
- **To work for desegregation throughout the community, seeking to exercise a Christian ministry of reconciliation;**
- **To foster genuine understanding and acceptance between persons of the two races within the YMCA, recognizing that true integration is a voluntary achievement and that Christians have a never-ending obligation to help establish relationships of mutual respect and brotherly co-operation.**

It is far easier to put these goals on paper than to say how far and how fast they can be put into practice. But God does not ask that we be successful, only that we be faithful. A YMCA will never find a perfect way to make its witness in society. What matters is whether it is prepared to take the risks of functioning as a Christian Association in a world where the frontiers change daily, and to trust God for the outcome. Officers of the National Council, in a letter sent to all member YMCAs during the troubled summer of 1963, declared: "The Young Men's Christian Association belongs in the forefront of efforts for a more Christian world — not so much in proclamation as in actual practice and effective influence."

Think of the problems, not only in racial relationships but in many other realms, which the young people of our generation in America are facing as they try to find their way amid rapid changes in social patterns and moral standards.

Amid this confusion the most effective guidance YMCA leaders can give is to demonstrate the kind of personal integrity and genuine concern for others which should be characteristic of any association which bears the name of Christian. This is the type of "Christian emphasis" which youth and the community in general can understand.

Notes for Chapter 4

¹ Gerald J. Jud, "Revolution and Renewal," *Social Action*, Jan., 1963, p. 15. By permission of the Council for Christian Social Action, United Church of Christ.

² Peter L. Berger, *The Precarious Vision* (New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1961), p. 173.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 207.

⁴ Roger L. Shinn, "Social Ethics" in *New Frontiers of Christianity* (New York: Association Press, 1962), p. 69.

⁵ Mott Memorial Lectures, *Christ's Ministry — and Ours* (New York: Friendship Press, 1962), p. 17.

⁶ Polly Nash, in "Spotlight on Youth" page of *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, April 13-14, 1963. By permission.

⁷ *Association Men*, Council of YMCAs of India, July, 1961.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ From *Christians in the World* by Jacques LeClercq, © Geoffrey Chapman Ltd., 1961, published by Sheed & Ward, Inc., New York.

¹⁰ Acts 10:34-35 (NEB).

¹¹ *Race: Challenge to Religion* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1963), pp. 65, 57, 70.

¹² James Sellers, *The South and Christian Ethics* (New York: Association Press, 1962), p. 25.

¹³ Letter from Birmingham Jail, April 16, 1963.

New Perspectives

A group of clergymen in an Eastern city were meeting with the writer to discuss basic issues in the ecumenical policy and practice of the YMCA. Included in the group was a young Roman Catholic priest, professor in a nearby university. In the course of the discussion the priest remarked, "You know, many Catholics are not so much opposed to the YMCA as confused by it." He went on to say that the activities of the YMCA seem to be almost wholly physical and recreational in nature, similar to programs with youth carried on under secular auspices. Where then does the *Christian* element come in? There would be no problem for the Catholic, he felt, if the YMCA were to be regarded as a civic organization; but the Catholic is confused by the YMCA claim to be doing Christian work. When the YMCA professes to be developing Christian character, it is performing a function of the Church.

In the same group was a minister of Reformed background who described how the YMCA looks to one who grew up in Eastern Europe. He had experienced the YMCA as a pietistic movement, a means for revitalizing the work of the Protestant churches, and at one time practically the youth work of the churches. But in America the YMCA seemed to have become largely a secular organization with little relation to the churches. He felt that the YMCA should realize more clearly

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on YMCA-Church

Relationships

the need for a close relationship to the churches, because a full Christian life cannot be developed outside the Church.

This confusion about the relation of the YMCAs of the United States to the churches is by no means confined to the clergy. Among the replies to the National Council inquiry on Christian purpose and practice, previously referred to, one can find very diverse reactions: "We believe that more emphasis should be placed on the relationship of the YMCA to all churches"; but also, "Let's leave religion to the churches because . . . if the YMCA includes religion it tends to result in the loss of co-operation from some church groups." The question that is uppermost in the minds of thoughtful YMCA leaders across the country is how the YMCA can be inclusive from the standpoint of religious affiliation and still be true to its Christian heritage. High on the list of concerns is the place in the YMCA of Jews and persons with no church affiliation — a question reserved for special treatment in the next chapter. But the most difficult problem of all is whether a lay Christian movement which has been Protestant in origin and outlook can gain enough acceptance from all churches — Catholic and Orthodox as well as Protestant — to serve as one of their outposts in the world and to contribute in significant ways to the cause of Christian unity.¹

No one will approach this question lightly. It is far more than a matter of good public relations and skill in handling interorganizational relationships. It leads straight to a consideration of the nature of the Church, which is at the heart of the deep present divisions within Christianity. It calls for a further clarification of the essential character and purpose of the American YMCA as a voluntary organization rooted in a Christian tradition but independent of all ecclesiastical bodies. What is the most accurate and appropriate designation of the YMCA: interconfessional? interdenominational? nondenominational? nonsectarian? ecumenical? In what sense, if any, is the YMCA a religious organization? Until such questions are answered — or at least faced squarely — both friends and critics will continue to be confused about the YMCA, and the American YMCA movement itself will continue to be a “split personality.”

A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

These questions must be viewed in a setting of the development of relationships between the YMCA and the churches in the United States since the first Association was founded in North America in 1851. This perspective must eventually take into account also the world-wide character of the YMCA, but this will be postponed for later consideration. Our concern here is not with practical forms of local cooperation between churches and YMCAs, of which many examples could be cited, but with general attitudes and trends. For a full treatment of these historical relationships in the United States up to 1948 the reader is referred to other sources.² But even a brief summary will set the stage for a new look at the situation in the 1960's.

At first the YMCAs in the United States allied themselves definitely with the evangelical Protestant churches. The control of local and state YMCAs was vested in members of these churches. At Portland, Maine, in 1869 a YMCA Convention tried to make this attachment watertight by defining in theological terms what was meant by an “evangelical”

church. YMCAs operated on behalf of these churches in war services, youth work, and lay leadership training. At the same time steps were taken to maintain independence from ecclesiastical control and to avoid any tendency for the YMCA itself to become a church.

By the early 1900's YMCAs were becoming "big business" and were increasingly absorbed in their own affairs. They were reaching out into the community and attracting young people regardless of church affiliation. They were taking a leading part in a world-wide YMCA missionary enterprise, which in Latin America and Asia was reaching Roman Catholic youths and adherents of non-Christian faiths, thus changing the ecumenical attitude of important segments of the American movement. Meanwhile the Protestant churches were expanding their work with youth at home and abroad, beginning services to college students, and in other ways entering into undertakings which at one time were almost the exclusive domain of the YMCAs.

World War I brought certain tensions because of YMCA initiative in war services on behalf of Protestant evangelical churches, but on the whole YMCAs continued to enjoy the widespread approval of Protestant ministers and laymen. Local federations of churches began to spring up, and YMCA secretaries often took a leading part in their organization. A need was felt for better channels of communication between the denominations and the YMCA functioning as a national organization, and several commissions were appointed to define more precisely the respective spheres of influence of the YMCAs and the churches.

In the 1920's and 1930's social agencies expanded rapidly, and the YMCA became more and more involved in community organization apart from the churches. The American movement also was much influenced by liberal trends in education and theology. Christian education came to be thought of as an emphasis permeating all YMCA activities; Religious Departments dropped out of existence almost completely. At the same time in Protestant circles there was

a "rediscovery" of the Church, which led to an expansion of enterprises directly under church auspices, such as the institutional church in large cities, and to more vigorous social action in face of pressing economic and political problems. The ecumenical movement within Protestantism was developing apace, with appreciation for what the lay Christian movements had done as pioneers but with much less direct dependence on their leadership.

Developments during World War II brought into the open an unresolved issue as to whether the YMCA could be at the same time a *religious* agency serving particularly the Protestant churches and a *community* agency serving all, regardless of religious affiliation. The desire to keep a balance between these two strands in its tradition is illustrated by a paragraph from a policy statement of the National Board of YMCAs in 1942:

The Young Men's Christian Association, which had its birth in the evangelical revival of the early nineteenth century and has continued to find its sustaining life in the Protestant churches, has as its traditional policy service to men, young men and boys, without regard to race, color or creed. The YMCA reaffirms this policy.

Although the Federal Council of Churches came to recognize the YMCA officially as representing the interests of the churches, it was apparent that no lay agency could function fully on behalf of the Protestant Churches. Early in 1941 a Christian Commission for Camp and Defense Communities was established. How should this enterprise of the Protestant churches operate in relation to the United Service Organizations (USO) which brought together six co-operating organizations including the YMCA and YWCA along with Catholic and Jewish social agencies? The resulting confusion is well described in an editorial in the Bulletin of the Federal Council of Churches at the close of the war:

When the USO was formed a fresh occasion of tension appeared. The YMCA and YWCA, having had a gratifying record of service in the First World War, assumed naturally enough that they should

join Catholic and Jewish agencies in working out co-operative arrangements. At the outset, however, there was no consultation with leaders in the Protestant churches. As a result they hardly knew whether Protestantism had any relation to the USO. The confusion which existed for a time is an indication of the problem arising from the lack of a well-defined and articulated relationship between the churches and the Associations. On the other hand, the fact that a series of consultations between leaders of the churches and the YMCA soon led to an effective clearance indicates that there is a vital bond of happy union between them.

In spite of this "happy union" the inherent dualism within the YMCA movement remained. This war experience heightened the YMCA's image of itself as an "interfaith" agency. Dr. Pence described this dilemma aptly as "between an emotional anchorage in historical Protestantism and a tendency toward interfaith acceptance." It was his judgment that this dilemma could be resolved only by a painstaking rethinking of the YMCA's major objectives.

ROMAN CATHOLICS AND THE AMERICAN YMCA

We turn now to the presence of Roman Catholics within the YMCAs of the United States and a quick review of official Catholic attitudes toward the YMCA. This is part of the historical perspective, but it will lead also to a glimpse into current changes in the situation which suggest the possibility of new approaches.

Statistics about the participation of Roman Catholics in YMCAs as members and leaders are never exact or complete, because annual reports do not call regularly for information on religious affiliation. This is part of the deliberate policy of the YMCA to place no restrictions, so far as religion is concerned, on those who wish to join and take part in its activities. Occasional studies are made of a sampling of the YMCA constituency and from these studies the following figures are drawn of the percentage of YMCA members according

	1942	1947	1952	1957
Protestants	61.4	60.7	70.0	75.2
Roman Catholics	27.5	28.3	23.0	19.0
Jews	6.3	5.9	4.0	3.3
Others and unknown	4.8	5.3	3.0	2.5

It would seem by conservative estimate that about one out of every five YMCA members in the United States is a Roman Catholic. The proportion of Roman Catholics seems to have declined during the last twenty years. This may be due in part to the expansion of Catholic youth organizations. But it is related also to a general decline in the proportion of YMCA members in the 18-to-30 age range. The majority of Catholic members in the YMCA seem to be young men who are especially interested in sports and physical activities, whereas the greatest growth in YMCA membership in recent years has been in the younger and older age brackets. If the membership figures are examined by regions, higher percentages of Roman Catholics are found in the Eastern and Central parts of the country. There are individual Associations, particularly in New England, where Roman Catholics may comprise 70 per cent or more of the membership.

In 1957 the total registered membership in the YMCAs of the United States was about 2,500,000 at a given date. This has now increased to almost 2,900,000 registered members. The best estimate, therefore, is that at present there are between 500,000 and 600,000 Roman Catholic members in American YMCAs. By comparison the number of members of the Eastern Orthodox Churches is very small. The only available figure is from a 1957 study, which put Orthodox membership at 0.6 per cent, or about 15,000 persons.

There was a time when membership on YMCA boards or committees of management was restricted to members of evangelical Protestant churches. In recent decades such restrictions have been dropped by the large majority of Associations. A study of a sampling of YMCAs in 1961 showed that 93.5 per cent of board members are Protestant, 4.2 per cent Roman Catholic, and 1.8 per cent Jews. In Eastern states

the figure for Catholics goes up to 7.0 per cent. Of all the Associations studied, 60 per cent reported one or more Roman Catholic directors. Obviously, the number of Catholics on boards of management is not fully representative of their position in the membership. On the other hand, it is becoming a growing practice to include Roman Catholics on these boards.

These figures gain in significance when seen against a background of persistent opposition from many of the Catholic clergy. No study has ever been made of the extent of this opposition, but many instances are reported of warnings issued from the pulpit against joining or supporting the YMCA. One could produce a considerable number of pamphlets with such titles as "May Catholics Join the YMCA?" Occasionally statements against the YMCA have appeared in parish bulletins or regional journals of the Catholic Church. More rarely one finds articles on this subject in national or international Catholic publications. Often these are fair and scholarly treatments, reflecting careful study of many YMCA documents.³

On the other hand, it would be easy to exaggerate both the extent and the violence of Roman Catholic opposition to the YMCA movement in the United States. Numerous illustrations could be given of friendship and co-operation by members of the Catholic clergy, and many more examples could be cited of tacit acceptance on their part of involvement by young Catholics in the YMCA. When a layman asks his priest whether he may become a YMCA leader he is likely to get a negative reply, but if he does not raise the question there is a strong probability that he will not incur any penalty. Though there is concern or open opposition by some bishops or priests to participation in the YMCA, the prevailing practice is silence and restraint. One may conclude that the great majority of the half million Catholics who are active in the YMCAs of the United States are unaware that they are doing anything contrary to conscience.

men to the YMCA must be looked at seriously. Some of these criticisms reflect certain ambiguities inherent in the YMCA's position.

- *The YMCA is essentially a religious organization.* An article in the *New Mexico Register* for July 28, 1961, warned Catholics against joining the YMCA, asserting that the YMCA "represents a religion without a church." It quoted a *Time* magazine article written on the occasion of the World YMCA Centennial in 1955: "From the first it was a religious movement of laymen, in spirit ecumenical, evangelical, and often puritanical." A pamphlet widely distributed in Roman Catholic churches, after quoting a number of statements from official YMCA publications, concludes: "[It] has kept before itself as its main purpose the bringing of religion into the lives of the young men it serves." Its answer to the question whether one may join the YMCA is clearly negative: "If the YMCA is concerned primarily with inculcating specific religious concepts, it follows logically that a Catholic who supports or subscribes to this program is in effect denying the principles of his own faith."⁴ Father Hardon in the *Unitas* article referred to earlier reports that Archbishop (now Cardinal) Meyer of Chicago told his people that membership in such an organization as the YMCA, even though taken out merely for the sake of recreation or the use of athletic facilities, "carries with it a compromise of one's own faith in the one true Church of Christ by becoming a member of a non-Catholic religious organization."

- *The American YMCA has been identified largely with Protestantism.* The same *New Mexico Register* declares: "The Y is not a community center, nor is it another form of the Rotary or Lions Club. The Y is, first of all, Protestantism." This Catholic newspaper quotes from a 1950 publication of the American YMCAs: "We must never forget that ours was a Protestant Christian inception and even though it is some-

times embarrassing where Roman Catholics are concerned, we still draw our main inspiration from our Protestant heritage. Our duty now is not to minimize but rather to maximize our heritage."⁵ The prevailing public image of the YMCA in the United States has been that it is Protestant in origin and orientation.

- *The YMCA fosters religious indifferentism.* The very fact that the YMCA includes in its constituency members of different Christian churches and persons of other faiths is dangerous from the Roman Catholic point of view. A Catholic youth may get the impression from his participation in the YMCA that one faith is as good as another and that no church possesses the fullness of truth. This problem is stated in question form but with an understanding spirit by a writer in *The Ecumenist*, a publication of the Paulist Press: **How can a Catholic take part in an organization which both in theory and practice seems to deny some aspects of his Catholic faith? If a Catholic joins a YMCA or YWCA with its heavily Protestant orientation, is he not by that very fact compromising his own faith, and will he not feel, as time passes, that it really doesn't matter to what Church he belongs, be it Catholic or Protestant?**

A pronouncement from the Vatican in 1920 is the basic source of negative attitudes toward the YMCA in the United States and other countries. This was a warning from the Holy Office in Rome addressed to all bishops. The YMCA was identified as a prime offender in drawing Catholic youth away from the faith, while offering opportunities for education and physical culture:

No doubt it boasts a sincere love for youth, as though it had nothing more at heart than their bodily and mental welfare. But at the same time it attacks their faith under the pretense of purifying it and of giving them a better knowledge of the true way of life, above all churches and apart from any religious creed!⁶

THE CHANGING ECUMENICAL SITUATION

Such objections present a problem of relationships between the YMCA movement and the Roman Catholic

Church which would seem at first glance incapable of solution, and in fact there are not a few YMCA leaders who regard any attempt to bring about a better relationship as bound to fail. There are others who seek a *rapprochement* with Catholic authorities solely on a practical level. They are tempted to minimize the Christian character of the YMCA in order to remove any charge that the YMCA is a religious organization. But surely the way forward is to be found neither in ignoring the problem nor in making adjustments which would change the essential character of the YMCA. Before we consider what modifications might appropriately be made in YMCA ecumenical policy and practice we need to look at the remarkable changes that are taking place in the general ecumenical situation, providing new hope for a more positive relationship between the YMCAs and the churches.

In 1942 Archbishop William Temple referred to the ecumenical movement as "the great new fact of our time." Essentially, the Church of Christ has been one from the beginning: "There is one body, one Spirit . . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism."⁷ But also from the earliest days there have been divisions, and the true unity of the Church has been seen as a distant goal: "So shall we all at last attain to the unity inherent in our faith."⁸ During the last fifty years there have been notable efforts among leading churchmen outside the Roman Catholic communion to bring about a greater visible unity which would be manifested not only in co-ordination of the missionary enterprise and co-operation on common social tasks but also in matters of faith, worship, and organization. In 1948 the World Council of Churches came fully into being. Its assemblies have gained world-wide attention. Its growth has exceeded all expectations. In recent years almost all the Orthodox and Eastern Churches have become members, changing greatly the complexion of the Council. The World Alliance of YMCAs maintains a consultative status with the World Council of

Churches, but not more, as is appropriate to its lay inter-confessional character.

For a number of years a great deal of ecumenical study has been taking place at several Roman Catholic centers, particularly in Europe. Recent developments do not represent a sudden shift to one who is familiar with what Father George Tavard has described as "two centuries of ecumenism." Nevertheless, the election of Pope John XXIII brought a new openness of the Papal See to ecumenical activity. This remarkable pontiff demonstrated from the beginning an irenic spirit toward his "separated brethren." In January, 1959, he surprised the whole Christian world by announcing that a Second Vatican Council, the first since 1870, would be held in Rome. In spite of the prodigious labor involved in preparing for such an event, Pope John insisted on holding it at an early date and the Council convened in October, 1962. The momentum of this notable gathering of bishops was not retarded by the death of Pope John in June, 1963, and a second session was held in the autumn of that year under the equally resolute leadership of Pope Paul VI.

Among the many interpreters of the significance of this Second Vatican Council none has received a wider hearing among non-Catholics than the young professor on the Catholic theological faculty of the University of Tübingen, Dr. Hans Küng. He caused a stir in non-Roman circles by dealing very frankly with the need for reform and renewal within the Catholic Church. He declared that for the first time since the Reformation the Church had "abandoned her passive, waiting attitude of detachment, delimitation, and periodic appeals to return to the Church" and through the invitation of Pope John was now coming out vigorously to meet the non-Catholic communions. The reform that he envisaged was to be "a renewal of the Church, an adaptation of the Church and her discipline to the demands of the present day." The way to reunion with the separated brethren, he wrote, was through inner renewal along with tangible re-

forms. This would require a sincere and brotherly approach from both sides. "It does not mean playing down the truth, soft-pedalling our differences, making false syntheses and easy compromises, but self-searching, self-criticism, self-reform in the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and with our separated brothers in mind."⁹

Writing later a series of letters on personal and theological problems addressed to a Catholic university student, Dr. Küng restated this point of view graphically:

The Church, too, as a building which men have built, is always having to be renewed, renovated, reformed. . . . It is no use demanding that the others come back unless we go out to meet them! We have been calling to the Orthodox in vain for nine hundred years, and to the Protestants for four hundred. We can't sit around in proud idleness, as though our Church did not bear a share, and a large share, of the guilt of schism, as though our Church did not have a duty, and a grave duty, to clear away obstacles and energetically prepare the way.¹⁰

Although the 1962 session of the Second Vatican Council was by no means conclusive, it led to several highly significant decisions. Editorial writers in American Catholic periodicals wrote of tremendous gains: "It has opened windows locked for centuries . . . ventilated questions long shut away unanswered. . . . Though occasional skirmishes still occur, the four-hundred year old cold war which has ravaged Christendom since the Reformation is rapidly coming to an end." A number of observers hailed Vatican Council II as the end of the Counter-Reformation. Both Catholic and Protestant leaders praised highly the preparatory work of the Secretariat for the Promotion of Christian Unity appointed by Pope John and rejoiced when it was given a permanent status.

One result in the United States of the more relaxed and congenial climate of recent years has been a marked increase in conversations and symposia among Protestant and Catholic leaders. Often these have been dialogues on basic

theological questions, but there is no hesitation about including also controversial social issues such as governmental support for parochial schools and birth control legislation. One of the most significant events in the religious world early in 1963 was the holding of a National Conference on Religion and Race under Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish auspices. Here a very forthright approach was made to problems of racial discrimination in America today and to the responsibility of religious groups to work together on concrete measures designed to bring about drastic changes in this situation.

How are the YMCAs of the United States being affected by this radically changed situation in which Protestant-Roman Catholic tensions are being relieved and Christians of different denominations are making genuine progress toward unity for the first time in hundreds of years? In the absence of any wide survey it is possible only to give general impressions. Here and there local Associations have taken full advantage of the favorable new climate. In one or two instances Catholic bishops who were delegates to the Vatican Council have come to the YMCA to speak about their experience in Rome to a group which included Protestant and Catholic clergy. Other Associations have joined in community-wide gatherings of a similar nature. In a few places YMCA leaders are in close touch with the development of new ecumenical centers. Catholic laymen serving on Area or National YMCA Councils are beginning to feel more at ease in dealing with religious questions.

But to be realistic one must conclude that thus far most Associations have not become keenly aware of any change of climate. Many YMCAs continue to be troubled about Catholic opposition but have done very little to re-examine their own ecumenical policies. Some leaders would like to initiate intensive studies relating to the YMCA's opportunities in working for Christian unity, but other matters which seem more pressing usually get priority. At best it requires considerable time for the findings of international and na-

tional gatherings to make a strong impact on local churches and YMCAs. Moreover, climate varies greatly with locality. Here is a new frontier for lay Christian movement action which has not yet caught the imagination of most YMCAs.

It should be noted, however, that American YMCA leaders took part in a world consultation at St. Cergue, Switzerland, in 1962 which represented a marked advance in ecumenical experience. This was a Consultation on Ecumenical Policy and Practice for Lay Christian Movements, jointly sponsored by the World Alliance of YMCAs and the World YWCA. It was one of the rare occasions when members of Orthodox, Protestant, and Roman Catholic Churches — both lay men and women and members of the clergy — were privileged to join informally and intimately in prayer, Bible study, and discussion on questions of ecumenical policy. To many participants it was a revelation that under proper conditions laymen and priests of the several confessions could take part in common prayer and Bible study without feeling that they were doing something not in accord with the teaching of their respective churches.¹¹

One by-product of this consultation which may have historic significance was an article entitled "The Changing 'Y' " in *The Ecumenist*, a North American journal for promoting Christian unity. The writer traces the strong Protestant orientation of the YMCA and the YWCA in earlier years but finds in actions of the 1955 meetings of these two world organizations an important change toward a wider ecumenical outlook. He then refers to the joint consultation at St. Cergue as a further notable expression of this desire to bring together lay people from all the Christian confessions.

The YMCA and YWCA, in their first one hundred years, have indeed undergone a quiet revolution. From a beginning deeply imbedded in the traditions of Evangelical Protestantism they have moved to a position of openness to all Christians, openness to the extent of wanting the leaders of all communions to help them develop a program in which all Christians can take part with no harm done to conscience.¹²

The writer points out that the ecumenical outlook of the Catholic Church has also been evolving rapidly in recent years. Then he asks some questions which suggest the possibility that there might be a change in the official position of the Roman Catholic Church toward the YMCA and YWCA:

Can we not foresee, then, perhaps even in the near future, the possibility of a change in the official Catholic evaluation of the YMCA and YWCA? Would it be overly sanguine to envision Christians, including Catholics, nourished in the traditions and worship of their own Churches, praying together for inspiration and guidance in their work, going out in Christian fellowship to a world that knows not Christ, to work for the spiritual, intellectual, social and physical betterment of all men?¹³

RETHINKING THE ROLE OF THE YMCA IN RELATION TO THE CHURCHES

A commission of the World Alliance of YMCAs which made a penetrating study of YMCA-Church relationships noted "a disquieting tendency for YMCAs and churches to drift and grow apart."¹⁴ The responsibility for this situation must doubtless be attributed partly to the preoccupation of churchmen with ecclesiastical affairs and failure to recognize fully the potentiality of lay Christian movements. But the first step for YMCA leaders is not to propose changes in the policy of the churches but to examine critically their own shortcomings. This distinction of course is somewhat artificial, since most leaders of YMCAs are also active laymen in their respective churches. Our attention here will be centered on YMCAs in the United States, but it is appropriate also to draw on the experience of the YMCA as a world movement. Our perspective includes the churches of all confessions, but we recognize that a special problem exists with reference to Roman Catholics and Orthodox in the YMCA.

A Young Men's Christian Association is *not* a *church* nor a substitute for a church. This has been asserted so often in national and world YMCA gatherings that further comment

would seem not to be necessary, were it not for the confusion on the part of some churchmen referred to at the beginning of this chapter. The term "association" gives the clue, sociologically and theologically, to the nature of the YMCA as a voluntary union of persons for a common purpose. The Church, on the other hand, is far more than an association or club formed by like-minded people. It is a community into which persons are called as they affirm their faith in God as revealed in Jesus Christ. Only in and through the Church are the sacraments administered. "The Church is by its nature and calling a community and not primarily an association," writes Dean Walter G. Muelder. Of course, as Dean Muelder and other Protestant theologians point out, there is always an institutional element in the Church, for no community can exist without institutions. These human forms can corrupt the transcendent, divinely ordained reality.

It is important also to insist that the YMCA *is not a religious society* in the sense in which Roman Catholics use that term. According to the late Father Weigel, Roman Catholicism is a society, "a living and structured organism" which mediates the gospel with decisive authority.¹⁵ Obviously, the YMCA has no corporate continuity with any of the great confessional traditions. YMCA leaders have acknowledged time and again that a full Christian experience comes only in and through the Church. They have declared that "the YMCA should constantly seek to encourage its members to accept the responsibilities of church membership, and to participate actively in the life and work of their particular churches."¹⁶

Several years ago the Faith and Order Commission of the British Council of Churches looked carefully at the relationship of the YMCA and the YWCA to the churches. A paragraph from a printed summary of their findings is perhaps the clearest theological statement on this point emanating to date from a church body:

However we define the Church, there are certain things which the Church is bound to do if it is to be the Church. Among these are the safeguarding and teaching of the truth as it is in Christ, and the corporate worship of God in Christ, including the proclamation of the Word and the observance of the sacraments. The YMCA and YWCA include teaching of Christian truth and acts of worship as a necessary part of their corporate life. They are not, however, charged with the safeguarding of the truth as it is in Christ in the same way as the Church, nor do they celebrate the sacraments. It is evident, therefore, that the YMCA and YWCA are not themselves Churches, although they are valuable auxiliaries.¹⁷

“Valuable auxiliaries”—but by what authority and to what end? It is relatively easy for Protestant churchmen to accept the validity of a voluntary Christian organization at work with youth but operating independently of the churches. But can Roman Catholic and Orthodox leaders recognize the YMCA as a genuinely Christian association not aligned with any confession and not under any type of church supervision or control? This is a crucial question to which as yet there is no clear answer, but there is reason to hope that the ecumenical progress which is now being made may lead under certain circumstances to a recognition of a YMCA as a Christian association in its own right without affiliation with any church. This would imply from the YMCA side an acknowledgment that although this lay movement has been associated historically in the United States with Protestantism, it is not essentially a Protestant institution but basically Christian and open on equal terms to persons of all confessions.

But it is not accurate in this context to speak either of *the* YMCA or *the* church. YMCAs are by nature autonomous societies. Some are so staunchly Protestant in orientation that for the present they find it almost impossible to think of their Associations as generically Christian without any confessional identification. Others, particularly in large cosmopolitan cities, can move more rapidly to a multiconfessional orientation. But there is great variation in ecumenical

outlook also among the churches including units of the Roman Catholic Church. Attitudes of bishops and priests toward the YMCA vary from diocese to diocese and will continue to do so, although it may be anticipated that the current ecumenical flexibility manifested in many European countries will before long have widespread influence in American Catholic circles. Those who hope for a "blanket" decision which would quickly solve all problems of YMCA-church relationships are poorly informed about the ways of working of both churches and YMCAs.

This point is recognized also by Father Paul Broadhurst, the writer of the *Ecumenist* article referred to earlier. After commenting on the lag between high-level policy of such organizations as the YMCA and the YWCA and the actual implementation of such policy in local Associations, he admits that there are divergent attitudes also among Catholics. In some areas the Catholic community too would have to undergo an evolution: "It is quite impossible today to generalize on the relation of Catholics and Protestants and, more especially, on the relation of Catholics to the Ys." But he affirms later that if approved Catholic participation in the YMCA and the YWCA were to come it would be "a new accomplishment in Christian understanding."

In spite of these stubborn barriers to full understanding there are many who regard the Young Men's Christian Association as potentially an auxiliary of great value to the churches. These Associations are in touch with areas of society and with individuals that the churches often find it difficult to reach. The British Council called on local churches to recognize that their own local YMCA or YWCA could be "a valuable organ of their own missionary activity."

Representatives of national YMCA movements meeting in Geneva in 1961 declared that the mission of the YMCA is "to build bridges from the world to the Church and to bring leaders of the Church into relationship with the world through the YMCA."¹⁸ Persons already related to a church

may see more clearly through their experience in the YMCA the relevance of the Christian faith to everyday life, and thereby be strengthened in that faith. Young people outside the churches or indifferent to them may through the YMCA gain a new experience of Christian faith and fellowship and be led to active membership in a church. If this "bridge" role of the YMCA is taken seriously, representatives of the churches and the YMCAs in local communities will come together more often to consider specific ways of utilizing effectively the resources of the Young Men's Christian Association.

UNTAPPED RESOURCES FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

Let us look now at the ecumenical role of the YMCA in the more explicit sense of its responsibility to work for Christian unity. The long-standing ecumenical concern of the YMCA movement is reflected in the motto of the World Alliance adopted in 1881 and repeated over and over at YMCA gatherings, "That They All May Be One." It would be illuminating to trace the varying concepts of this ecumenical role on the part of YMCA leaders, but we limit our attention to certain precise contributions which this lay Christian movement can make to the cause of Christian unity at the present time.

The starting point is to recognize that it is in the nature of an independent lay movement to be concerned primarily with relationships between persons rather than between churches. It is not the function of the YMCA to deal officially or technically with those questions of faith and order which are so prominent in consultations about church union. The genius of the YMCA at this point lies not so much in discussion as in demonstration. Church leaders are struggling to change the attitudes of bodies of Christians who are at present worshipping in separate communions. In the YMCA, on the other hand, members of different Christian churches have already come together in one association. To this extent a Christian Association is a demonstration of a unity

that already exists, very different it is true from the fully realized unity of the Church, but nevertheless potentially of great significance both for personal experience and as a witness to the world.

Too seldom, however, do YMCAs take full advantage of the opportunity for more direct ecumenical education which is inherent in these informal contacts among Christians who belong to different churches. It is normal that in many activities YMCA members should work and play together with no thought of their belonging to diverse religious traditions. But there are occasions when these differences cannot and should not be ignored. Among teen-age youth and younger boys, for example, questions often arise about different observances of religious holidays, different forms even of the Lord's Prayer, and so on. The leader can make use of such an occasion to develop respect for differences in religious conviction and practice. Furthermore, the press, radio, and television carry an abundance of news on current ecumenical events, and discussions on these matters could take place as a matter of course in YMCA circles. A wise leader will guide such discussions away from superficial argument into deeper dialogue. Our task as Christians, writes Professor Edmund Schlink, is "not to ignore the separate church traditions but to make them accessible to each other." One of the stubborn questions on which it is difficult for Protestants and Roman Catholics to reach agreement, yet which has loomed large in YMCA programs and publications, relates to boy-girl relationships and informal types of sex education before and after marriage.

Those who took part in the world consultation at St. Cergue made the point that YMCAs and YWCAs cannot lay claim to being ecumenical just because they have members of different Christian confessions in their constituency. "They are ecumenical only to the extent that persons of varying Christian traditions can live and work together in mutual respect and confidence." They declared also that it is not enough to encourage YMCA members to be active

and loyal in their own churches. These young people and adults should be prepared through their YMCA experience to foster an ecumenical spirit in their churches.

But the ecumenical role of the YMCA must be seen not only as a function of its own internal program and fellowship but also as an important dimension of its service in the community. Christian Associations may provide a valuable "theater for ecumenical activity." When we think of the Church dispersed in the world, the challenges that Christians face as parents, farmers, lawyers, and industrial workers are very much the same whether they are Methodists, Lutherans, or Roman Catholics. "Helping Christians to be the Church in the world is a common task for all churches," declares Hans-Ruedi Weber. Members of the St. Cergue Consultation concluded that "the Christian Associations should provide a base from which persons of different confessions can co-operate in social service and social action, and thereby help to develop a more effective strategy for ecumenical co-operation."¹⁹ Here again we strike the familiar theme of the opportunity of a lay Christian movement to be a task force for the laity at work on the frontiers where the Church meets the world.

All this presupposes a mutual interdependence between the YMCA and the churches. In an increasingly secularized society members of the YMCA should be aware of their "dependence on the ordered and sacramental life of the Church for the continuance of their Christian witness." The World Alliance Commission that studied the relation between the YMCA, the churches, and Christian unity observed that a Christian Association should be *free* enough to perform its essentially lay task, yet *near* enough to the churches to ensure that the work and witness of its members are brought under the judgment and love of God through worship and the preaching of the Word.

Another prerequisite is a continuing deep concern within the YMCA over the division of the churches. It is not enough casually to recognize differences among Christians or in-

cidentally to develop mutual respect. It is necessary for all Christians to share the "burden of separation," to be determined to bear witness for Christ "on and across the frontiers by which Christendom is still so tragically divided."²⁰ YMCAs are called to be persistent amid difficulties, patient under setbacks, committed to a ministry of reconciliation. They are called not only to work but to pray earnestly for Christian unity as God wills it, whatever unknown form that unity may take.

There are many practical considerations for YMCA program, membership policy, and leadership training which we must reserve for later consideration. We submit in conclusion that no one can overestimate the quiet influence of a YMCA which takes its ecumenical responsibility seriously. Father George Tavard has written eloquently about the role of Christian laymen in bringing about reconciliation:

If and when the day of reunion finally dawns, it will not be due firstly to the efforts of apostles or to the attempts of leaders to bridge abysses of separations. It will be the work of thousands of humble souls who, throughout the Christian world, will have prayed and suffered in their longing after a reunion they could not themselves see.²¹

Notes for Chapter 5

¹ There are two distinct aspects of the YMCA's inclusiveness. One is the presence of members of the major Christian confessions—Protestant, Orthodox, and Roman Catholic—as well as of persons from widely divergent Protestant denominations. This is the *ecumenical* situation. The other is the presence in the YMCA membership of a number of Jews and a few persons of other faiths. This, strictly speaking, is the *interfaith* situation.

² S. Wirt Wiley, *History of YMCA-Church Relations in the United States* (New York: Association Press, 1944, o.p.) and Owen E. Pence, *Present-Day YMCA-Church Relations in the United States* (New York: Association Press, 1948, o.p.).

³ For example, John A. Hardon, S.J., "A Catholic View of the YMCA," *Unitas*, International Quarterly Review, Spring, 1960.

⁴ *May Catholics Join the YMCA?*, Redemptionist Fathers, Liguori, Mo., 1957.

⁵ *Faith for the Future* (New York: Association Press, 1950, o.p.).

⁶ *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, Vol. XII, Nov. 5, 1920, p. 595.

⁷ Ephesians 4:4-5 (NEB).

⁸ Ephesians 4:13 (NEB).

⁹ From *The Council, Reform and Reunion* by Hans Küng, © Sheed & Ward, Inc. 1961, Published by Sheed & Ward, Inc., New York. pp. 4, 93, 100.

¹⁰ From *That the World May Believe* by Hans Küng, © Sheed & Ward Inc. 1963, Published by Sheed & Ward, Inc., New York. pp. 39, 81.

¹¹ *Report of the Consultation on Ecumenical Policy and Practice for Lay Christian Movements* (Geneva, Switzerland: World Alliance of YMCAs, 1962).

¹² From article by Father Paul Broadhurst in *The Ecumenist*, Paulist Press, Vol. I, 5, June-July, 1963. By permission of the Paulist Press.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *The YMCA, the Church, and Christian Unity*, 1957.

¹⁵ Gustave Weigel, S.J., *Faith and Understanding in America* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1959), pp. 51, 59.

¹⁶ World YMCA Centennial Declaration, 1955.

¹⁷ *A Call to Understanding and Action*, British Council of Churches, 1959.

¹⁸ *Called to New Things* (Geneva, Switzerland: World Alliance of YMCAs, 1961), p. 97.

¹⁹ Report of Consultation, *op. cit.* in Note 11 above, p. 29.

²⁰ World YMCA Centennial Declaration, 1955.

²¹ *The Church, the Layman and the Modern World* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1959), p. 67. By permission.

6

**New Perspectives
for a Christian Association**

It is possible for Christians to preach Jesus Christ as the one Truth by which alone man can be saved and at the same time be humble, open and tolerant. In fact, the Christian's exclusive commitment to Christ the Truth is the basis of his inclusiveness, his respect of every man's reason and conscience and toleration of all truths.¹

On a summer day in New York City a well-dressed Negro was selling Black Muslim propaganda on the street corner. Nearby, just outside a Columbia University building was parked a car covered with signs in large letters, "Jesus Christ Saves from All Sin—Now." Meanwhile in Yankee Stadium the Jehovah's Witnesses were holding an international convention which was expected to attract 125,000 people. This is America, a country where all kinds of minority religious groups can get a hearing, under police protection if necessary.

In referring to religious pluralism in the United States attention is usually centered on the three major religious communities — Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Jewish. This practice is of course an oversimplification. In addition to the somewhat unusual phenomena in New York described above, there are a number of religious groups in America which are hard to classify under the familiar threefold category. Two of these are international movements which were in existence long before the United States came into being: the Unitarians who for centuries have challenged many of the views about Christ which are basic in the main stream of Christian thought; and the Religious Society of Friends, who rely radically on the guidance of the Spirit and stress simplicity rather than sacraments, yet regard themselves as firmly within the Christian tradition. Then there are two bodies of substantial constituency which were established in America

a Pluralist Society

in the nineteenth century: The Church of Christ, Scientist, based on an interpretation of the Scriptures which stresses divine healing; and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormon). There is also a variety of sects with a Pentecostal emphasis, often loosely organized. Young people from all these groups will be found in YMCA activities, and not a few respected YMCA leaders come from these religious bodies which deviate in one way or another from classic Protestantism. In addition, the Orthodox Churches of Greek and Russian origin are fast becoming an important element in American religious life.

The close identification of the American YMCA historically with Protestantism is generally acknowledged. But for some years Association leaders have been stressing the nonsectarian character of the YMCA, especially as they seek wide support from the community through the United Fund and their own membership campaigns. There are those who in effect would put the word "Christian" in fine print, in order to demonstrate that the program and fellowship of the YMCA are open to persons of all religious persuasions or none. The greatest difference of opinion in recent National Council meetings centered around the phrase in the constitutional statement of purpose, "united by a common loyalty to Jesus Christ." Although this phrase was finally retained without amendment, a significant minority of the delegates felt that this was an unrealistic description of the YMCA constituency as it now exists. They would have preferred to substitute a more general term such as "Christian principles" or "the teachings of Jesus."

Here is a deep-cutting issue which has important implications for YMCA program and structure. It is another aspect of the basic question stated at the beginning of the preceding chapter: How can the YMCA be inclusive from the standpoint of religious affiliation and yet retain its integrity as a *Christian* Association? The statement adopted by the National Council in 1963 after more than two years of study represents on the whole a successful effort to reconcile

divergent points of view, but it did not settle the issue once for all. This action might be regarded as a "holding" operation which gives time for more thorough consideration of underlying social and theological questions. Our purpose here is to suggest new perspectives which may keep the discussion open and perhaps lead to a consensus on some of the unresolved issues. We shall be drawn also into another question that is far from academic: how an organization with a Christian label can reach the large number of young people who look upon all forms of organized religion as irrelevant to their real interests.

PLURALISM: HOPE OR HAZARD?

Thirty years ago an able French observer of the American scene, André Siegfried, could describe Protestantism as the national religion of the United States, the counterpart of the established churches so familiar in Europe. But now, a generation later, students of the American situation are unanimous in characterizing our society as pluralistic. Will Herberg, whose pioneering studies have been cited earlier, declares that America has become a three-religion country. In a foreword to the notable Protestant-Catholic dialogue which was given the nonfiction award during National Brotherhood Week in 1961, he wrote: "The normal religious implication of being an American today is that one is either a Protestant, Catholic or Jew. . . . These three religious groups are cultural subcommunities, defining three variant ways of being an American. . . . Jews and Catholics have at last become Americans, related to other Americans in the complex pattern of American group life."²

Robert McAfee Brown, the Protestant spokesman in this dialogue, points out that we are now a nation in which it is impossible for the Protestant to claim the special privileges he had in the past. On the other hand, Franklin Littell fears that Protestants have not yet accepted the new religious situation in the United States. He concludes that all three religious groups have yet to attain a maturity and self-under-

standing that will take advantage of the great potential of a pluralist society.³ Father John Courtney Murray in an earlier Seminar on Religion in a Free Society had a slightly different analysis when he spoke of our pluralist society as a pattern of four interacting "conspiracies": Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, secularist. He used this term not in any invidious sense but as referring to united action for certain common ends. Father Murray does not look for any utopian consensus in American society, but he is convinced that bitter argument can give way to orderly and well-informed conversation.⁴

Religious pluralism represents in many ways an advance over the earlier dominance of a particular religious group, legally or culturally. It is a healthy phenomenon, one evidence of a society come of age. It assures to religious minorities equal status before the law. It provides a framework within which religious communities can work together amicably for common ends. It encourages fair representation in civic enterprises.

But there are also hazards in pluralism from the standpoint of any prophetic religious faith. Herberg, member of a religious minority that stands to profit most from pluralism, is among the first to point out these dangers. He says that the greater ease of religious contact which we now enjoy in the United States tends to impede efforts to probe to a deeper level of communication.

One's religious beliefs are held to be one's own business, not something to parade in public or argue about with other Americans. . . . Americans live and work together with their fellow Americans of other faiths, co-operate and quarrel with them in business, community affairs and politics, and yet know virtually nothing about their religious life, and appear unconcerned, even reluctant, to find out. Interfaith co-operation and religious isolation seem to be the two opposed poles of American religious pluralism.⁵

In other words, the current prestige in America of any activity that is interfaith may unwittingly stifle the dialogue

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among persons of different religious convictions. It may also play into the hands of the anemic religion-in-general referred to earlier and thus prevent our major religious groups from making their most valuable contribution to the well-being of our nation. This point is made forcefully in the booklet, *Religion and American Society*, a statement of principles emerging from lengthy discussions by eight distinguished men from the four major "conspiracies":

Religion makes its most significant contribution to American society by remaining true to its vocation as the judge of society. . . . The religious man's loyalty to the state can never be wholly unqualified. . . . The free society bears with it special temptations for religious men. . . . The "openness" of our society may affect the quality of religious affirmation. . . . The result is the opinion, common enough, that that church is best which causes the fewest problems for society at large. This may result in a religion tamed, religion turned into a gentle domestic feature of American life. . . . The result is frequently a bizarre religiosity—the authentic voice of religion goes unheard while the institutions of religion grow prosperous.⁶

PLURALISM AND THE YMCA

Before going on to a more positive perspective on the current situation we pause for another look at ways in which the YMCAs of the United States reflect both the hope and the hazard of religious pluralism. Statistics on the religious affiliation of members and volunteer leaders were given in the preceding chapter. These show that about 20 per cent of YMCA members are Roman Catholics and 3 to 4 per cent are Jews. These percentages are almost identical with the best estimate of the proportion of these two religious groups in the total population. They indicate a general policy of an open door to young people and adults regardless of religious affiliation. If these figures were broken down further they would probably show that YMCAs attract a fairly good cross section of all religious groups in the community. Count-

mittees of persons talking, playing, and planning together in full harmony without distinction as to religious background. With a minimum of fanfare and tension YMCAs for years have been demonstrating the possibility of transcending religious differences in pursuit of common practical interests.

National leaders are eager to maintain and extend this inclusiveness. They urge the removal of any religious restrictions that may still remain in local membership policies. The 1963 National Council statement on Christian purpose and practice includes two sentences that bear directly on this point: "We welcome as members of our Associations persons of all religious affiliations who wish to join and co-operate in support of the Christian ideals and values for which we stand. . . . [The YMCA] seeks to find forms of lay religious expression that will reflect understanding of the teachings and practices of all the churches to which YMCA members belong."

And yet there is a sharp divergence of opinion within the American movement regarding the desirability of making the stated Christian purpose of the YMCA explicit. Replies to the National Council inquiry quoted in an earlier chapter reflect a concern on the part of many leaders lest essential Christian emphases be toned down to a whisper in an effort to offend no one. In an Association with a mixed constituency how can one introduce religion without being divisive? This is the quandary leaders face. Some believe that the YMCA program must be confined to practical applications without any theological reference: "The YMCA performs a laboratory function in applied Christianity where programs involve persons of differing religious persuasions working at common tasks." But there are others who feel that there can be no true tolerance without commitment: "Tolerance of other persons' religious beliefs and co-operation with those of other faiths is accepted by a majority today; but tolerance is based on a positive belief or conviction on the part of the one who is tolerant. It is not diluting one's own beliefs to

the lowest common denominator. The YMCA should aid each one to strengthen his own belief."

TOLERANCE AND THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

One way out of this apparent impasse is to look again at the nature of the Christian faith and see what tolerance means in this context. During the last twenty-five years there has been a fresh debate among Christian thinkers regarding the relation of Christianity to other religions. Americans on the whole have looked upon this as a rather academic question, since the lands in which other faiths are dominant are on the other side of the world. But with the rapid increase in communication there is more and more interpenetration of cultures. The wave of interest in Zen Buddhism and the coming of thousands of students from Asia and Africa are illustrations of an impact of other faiths on American life that will become more pronounced each year. In this situation the mediaeval thesis that all other religions are heathen and must be eliminated through a Christian crusade is obviously untenable. But equally naive is the common assumption that all religions are equally valid, each for its own adherents, or that the goal to strive for is some form of syncretic mosaic of the best elements in all faiths. At the risk of oversimplification one may attempt to outline in a few paragraphs the main trend in current thinking by Christian scholars about the relation of Christian faith to other religions.

God has manifested himself in many ways in different times and places. Everything we call "religion," primitive or advanced, is an expression of man's effort to relate himself to the Power or powers that determine his destiny. But religion may be regarded also as men's varying responses to the one true God who is constantly seeking to communicate with them. Christians are convinced that God has made a special and decisive self-disclosure in Jesus of Nazareth. The rays of the sun are widely diffused but they may be focused so sharply through a reading glass that they set paper or twigs on fire. So God's light and love, which are

expressed in a measure everywhere—"who makes his sun rise on good and bad alike"—were focused at a particular time in a Person, a real human being, so that this became the life of God incarnate.⁷ This Christ-event—not only the life of Jesus but also his death and resurrection, not only his teachings but also his power to change lives—is the center of the Christian faith. If one calls himself a Christian it is because he finds in this revelation of God in Christ the central meaning for his life and for all human existence. This faith gives coherence to life, in both its personal and its cosmic proportions. "All things are held together in him."⁸

But this does not mean that the Christian can be indifferent to all other revelations of God or that he must disparage all other religious systems. God has not left himself without witness in nature, in the arts, in all varieties of religious experience. When the crowds in Lystra hailed Paul and Barnabas as gods in human form because Paul had healed a crippled man, the apostles objected strenuously: "We are only human beings. . . . The good news we bring tells you to turn from these follies to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them. In past ages he allowed all nations to go their own way; and yet he has not left you without some clue to his nature."⁹

Nor does this mean that Christians in America or any other country have grasped fully the meaning of God's revelation in Christ, much less that they are expressing in their own personal and corporate life a complete obedience as disciples of Jesus Christ. They are always vulnerable because of both ignorance and sin. They can speak with assurance and conviction about their faith, but always humbly and with honest confession of their own shortcomings. To try to defend all that goes under the name of Christianity would be an intolerable burden. The God of the Bible can never be possessed by those who accept him in faith; rather, they are caught up in a relationship which impels them always to press on toward "the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." As William Sloane Coffin, Jr. declared in speaking to a National

YMCA-YWCA Student Assembly in 1962: "Christianity is not some vague atmosphere, spiritual climate, or glow in the heart, but an allegiance to a demanding relationship, one, we might say, that must be re-established every day."

Dr. W. A. Visser 't Hooft, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, defines syncretism as an effort to harmonize varying religious ideas and experiences so as to create one universal religion. He regards this widespread phenomenon as a far more dangerous challenge to the Christian church than thoroughgoing atheism. Among the renowned figures whom he mentions as syncretistic in their approach are Carl Jung, Mahatma Gandhi and Arnold Toynbee, and among the well-known syncretistic movements of our day are Bahai, Theosophy, and to a large extent Moral Rearmament. Yet he asserts, "It is possible for convinced Christians to enter into true dialogue with convinced Hindus or Muslims or Jews, yes and even syncretists, without giving up their basic conviction."¹⁰

In what sense, then, is Jesus Christ *the way, the truth, the life*? Dr. Gerald Cooke, after reviewing diverse theological positions on this question, suggests an answer: "The New Testament understanding of the 'once-for-all' character of God's self-disclosure in Christ is best perceived in terms of *depth* rather than *finality*. . . . The revelation in Christ was and is once for all decisive *for those who have come to know him*. But who will presume to limit the divine intent and power by saying that this revelation cannot be partially reflected elsewhere, or that in it lies the totality of truth without remainder?"¹¹

Related to this is the conviction that when a Christian seeks to communicate the gospel to persons of other religious backgrounds he should realize that in some sense God has been there before him. It is the opportunity of the Christian to remove the veils that conceal the full revelation of God in Christ. "This lifting of the veil," Father Raymond Pannikar reminds us, "does not occur without pain and conflict. . . . Christian revelation is by no means a superficial

brushing up, but a stripping off." ¹² This Indian priest makes clear that the sharing of the gospel with persons of other faiths, properly understood, is not an intrusion:

When the Christian preaches the message of Christ he is not an intruder and a foreigner, but he is the messenger that brings what the peoples are longing and looking for, though sometimes he may not be received. . . . The relation of non-Christian religions with Christianity is not one of error to truth, darkness to light, evil to goodness, but rather of potency to act, seeds to fruits, type or symbol to the thing and reality in itself. ¹³

It is against this background that one is in a better position to understand the paradoxical statement by M. M. Thomas with which this chapter opened. A Christian can show respect for all truth in other religions without compromising his commitment to the Truth in Christ. It is one thing, Thomas says, to recognize the right of all persons freely to choose their "gods"; it is quite another thing "to define tolerance as the recognition of the equality of all 'gods.'" The tolerance of the Christian is not superficial and easygoing. It is founded on mutual respect, but without giving up basic convictions. A sentence from the First Letter of Peter puts this counsel succinctly: "Be always ready with your defence whenever you are called to account for the hope that is in you, but make that defence with modesty and respect." ¹⁴

CHRISTIANS AND JEWS: A SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP

If we were to pursue this fascinating question further we should have to take up other historic faiths one by one. The situation in each of these religious systems—Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, to name those with the largest number of adherents—is different, and the first obligation of the Christian who is seeking an encounter is to gain a more intimate knowledge of both the philosophy and the practice of a particular faith. But in the YMCAs of the United States the dominant question pertains not to the religions of the Orient but to Judaism.

Jews have been widely dispersed for more than 2000 years, but more of them live in the United States than anywhere else in the world. There are between 5,000,000 and 6,000,000 Jews in this country, comprising 3 to 4 per cent of the American people. Judaism has its theological structure but it is above all a way of living, including in its more orthodox manifestations adherence to strict laws about food and Sabbath observance. Even though a smaller proportion of Jews attend synagogues and temples regularly than is true of Christians, the great majority observe the High Holy Days. To a remarkable degree they have resisted assimilation and wish to retain their identification with the Jewish community, although thoroughly American in outlook and organization. Fund raising among Jews has reached a high level of efficiency; Jews contribute more per capita to welfare causes, including aid for Israel, than any comparable group in the United States. Fortunately, outbursts of anti-Semitism are becoming increasingly rare; Jews have achieved status as an integral part of American Society. But Will Herberg observes that Judaism here exhibits the same secular-religious paradox as other segments of the American people: "Much of the institutional life of the synagogue has become thus secularized and drained of religious content precisely at the time when religion is becoming more and more acknowledged as the meaning of Jewishness." ¹⁵

In considering the relationship between Christianity and other religions, the Jews of course hold a special place. Strictly speaking, the religious system known as Judaism developed during and after the Exile five centuries before Christ. Both Christianity and Judaism have their roots in the ancient religion of Israel. Both faiths draw heavily on God's revelation through the Hebrew prophets. Jesus of Nazareth was a Jew steeped in the prophetic tradition. The Judeo-Christian faith in a transcendent and righteous God who is the judge of all nations stands over against all religious systems which merge man with nature or make an easy accommodation to the prevailing culture. Perhaps this is what Pope

Pius XI meant when he said, "Spiritually, we are all Semites." Up to a point, therefore, Christians and Jews are partners in the struggle against unbelief and secularization.

But this recognition of common elements in our two traditions should not prevent us from looking squarely at differences between the Christian and Jewish faiths. To ignore or rule out those distinguishing characteristics that make for Jewishness or Christian-ness is no service to either group. Jews differ among themselves on many points, but basically the Jew thinks of himself as belonging to a particular ethnic community in a covenant relation to God through the Law and the Prophets, and believes that this community has a unique role to play in relation to the "Gentiles." Likewise the Christian who is more than a nominal believer recognizes that he belongs to a universal community, centered around Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, which has a mission to the world. "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself . . . and he has entrusted us with the message of reconciliation."¹⁶ The crucial point of difference relates to this revelation of God in Jesus of Nazareth and its meaning for all men. This is not to be dismissed as a matter of mere theological speculation; it makes a tremendous difference in personal experience and social outlook. One of these distinguishing elements is stated clearly by Rabbi Arthur Gilbert:

Jews believe that we live in an unredeemed world. It is this stiff-necked assertion that distinguishes the Jew in a most relevant way from the Christian. For, in his denial that the Christ has come, the Jew makes judgment that the world . . . is in an unfinished state; and that man need still struggle to bring a harmony, a purposefulness, a wholeness to the competing, conflicting instincts of his fleshy inheritance. . . . The Jew accepts the unredeemed world as a challenge. Salvation is to be sought in the good work of reshaping the world. . . . God in his own time will send the Messiah and will justify all sacrifice and all martyrdom.¹⁷

The Young Men's Christian Association of the United States is not a religious community in the strict sense of that

term. It has welcomed into its membership not only persons of all Christian denominations but Jews. Beyond doubt it has done a great deal in a quiet way to break down any remnant of anti-Semitic feeling which may exist in the community. But YMCA leaders have been far from consistent in their dealings with Jews. Sometimes they have insisted that they sign a statement of Christian purpose in order to become members, thoughtless of the conflict of conscience this might entail. More often they have assumed that Jewish members without question could support *Christian* principles or ideals. Too seldom have they made clear to themselves or others what it means for a Jew to be a member of the board of a Christian Association. Too often in the name of tolerance there has been on both sides a certain compromise of conviction.

THE YMCA AS A CENTER FOR COMMUNICATION

Our era has been called many things, but one of the most apt designations would be an Age of Communication. "Ours is certainly the age which has become explicitly conscious of the importance of man's sharing his thoughts with others," said Father Walter J. Ong, a Roman Catholic professor, in an illuminating paper on "The Religious-Secular Dialogue."¹⁸ In this technological age we are likely to think primarily of mass communications, but this tendency underlines the need to center more attention upon person-to-person communication. It is in this realm of personal relationships that the YMCA can make its greatest contribution.

Here is a potential which needs to be realized more fully in a religiously pluralist society, for the approach of Christianity to other faiths referred to earlier always ends by stressing the need for deeper personal dialogue. After all, in daily life we do not confront religious systems but persons: not Islam but Muslims, not Judaism but Jews. Our approach as Christians meeting persons of other cultures and faiths is to be characterized by a humility which prompts us both to tell what we know and to listen to what our friends have to

tell us. D. T. Niles describes evangelism in an unforgettable metaphor: "The Christian is one beggar telling another where to find food." Among the many statements on this subject we quote two:

In mutual respect persons of different religious experience and traditions learn and gain insight into the experience and traditions of others. In mutual friendship they may open their confidence to one another, revealing dimensions of their awareness and experience which are not normally accessible to the level of inquiry alone.¹⁹

If the Christian has really trusted in Christ, he can open himself without any fear to any wind that blows from any quarter of the heavens. If by chance some of those winds should blow to him unexpected treasures, he will be convinced that Christ's storehouses are wide enough to gather in those treasures too, in order that in the last day nothing may be lost.²⁰

Through dialogue, says Professor Ong, one does not seek to win over the other in argument. Nor does he try only to understand the other's point of view intellectually. "By dialogue a person seeks not to grasp but to commune, to open himself to another. . . . Dialogue is a way of achieving unity while preserving differences. . . . Dialogue is an action whereby an individual asserts his own uniqueness by the very process of uniting himself with another or others."²¹

The YMCA may rightly take a certain pride in its welcome to persons of varied religious backgrounds. But has this openness really provided a stimulus to significant dialogue? Many meetings take place in the YMCA, but far too little real *meeting*. Where this communication does take place most readily—in clubs, camps, counseling—too seldom does it get into the sharing of reflections on religion. Granted that delicate questions in this realm should be handled with care under competent leadership, we find it exciting to think of the creative role which some YMCAs could take by offering one of the few places where Christians and Jews and those without any religious commitment could meet to share with

one another their basic questions and deepest concerns. We are thinking in part of organized courses or seminars where persons of different religious background may make their contributions, but even more of the day-by-day opportunities for person-to-person communication on matters of faith.

It is the Student Christian Associations quite naturally which have taken advantage most often of this opportunity. The Student YMCA of the University of Illinois, for example, seeks a "bi-polar thrust" in its program. "We encourage both a breadth of search for purpose and meaning and at the same time, for those who are ready to do so, an opportunity to deepen their understandings of and commitment to the Christian faith." This is expressed in two of the program objectives of this Association: "(1) The YMCA provides a common meeting ground for any who wish to probe deeply into the purpose and meaning of life. (2) In the open search for religious meaning which takes place in the YMCA, the Christian faith is presented as clearly as possible, not dogmatically but through open sharing." After much consultation and debate the National Student Council of YMCAs early in 1963 adopted a new statement of purpose which reflects the same point of view:

Student YMCAs, part of a world-wide Christian Movement, seek to help persons to study and work toward rich and full life and a free and just society. They seek to attract and unite in active fellowship and service persons of all Christian confessions, adherents of other faiths and those who affirm no religious belief. They are committed to encouraging individuals in their search for life purpose to confront the power and relevance of the Christian faith.

An underlying assumption of this emphasis on dialogue is that those who take part will have something genuine to communicate. Professor Ong asserts that dialogue must be between persons who know where they themselves stand. "Otherwise it will degenerate into the mere talk of a television commercial." The YMCA cannot become the real meeting place for significant dialogue unless its Christian

members have a clear understanding and definite conviction about their own faith. Here again we must confess that many of our YMCA enterprises are rich in contact but meager in content.

THE YMCA IN NO-MAN'S LAND

There is said to be a lake in Connecticut with a long Indian name meaning "You-fish-on-your-side-I-fish-on-my-side-nobody-fish-in-the-middle." We should be unrealistic if we thought of communication in the YMCA as only between well-informed believers of different Christian confessions or between Christians and Jews or the rare Muslim and Hindu who come into our American Associations. We should be overlooking a large number of youth and adults who are lukewarm toward any church and others of skeptical spirit who shy away from anything with a religious slant. When we talk about 95 per cent of the people of the United States identifying themselves on paper with one of the three major religious communities, we should not forget another set of statistics that show at least 30 per cent of the population who are not actually members of any church or synagogue. Some of these would call themselves humanists or liberals; others couldn't care less about categories of any kind. In truth, even in "religious" America there is a large no-man's land. And to translate Christian faith into the thought forms of this age is perhaps a more pressing problem in America than the encounter of Christianity with other religions.

YMCA leaders may react slowly to generalizations of this kind, but they cannot help being stirred by current stories of a moral and rebellious suburban teen-age youth. In one of the magazine articles dealing with restless high school students and lax parents in suburbia and describing the incredible party-crashing antics of these young people, there is a paragraph that is sobering to all who are related to voluntary organizations at work with youth:

The typical suburban town has a movie theater, a bowling alley, a country club, a restaurant. Local schools ordinarily provide some

form of after-hours activity. The YMCA, the YWCA and similar organizations afford various forms of recreation. Some teen-agers do take advantage of these opportunities, but too many others—particularly the restless and the sophisticated—do not. “How square can you get?” says one of them. “I like to go out and have a couple of beers, dance with my girl and sit around with the other kids. There’s a Coke machine and a jukebox in the YMCA, but I’d rather drop dead than go there.”²²

This too is the image of the YMCA for not a few young people and young adults: The YMCA is a place for the “good” boys and girls. It is under the control of adults who keep young people from doing things they would like to do. It is a place for “character building,” not for those who are looking for a good time. It is for “squares”; these people are living in a different world. In one Connecticut community a committee studying this situation has come to the conclusion that “teen-agers want and need ‘a place of their own’ . . . free of the institutional atmosphere found at the Y or the school gymnasium. Teen-agers want to get away from adults, to have their own ‘club’ in which they do not feel patronized or spied upon.”

It would take us too far afield at this point to grapple with this problem intensively. We could give illustrations of communities where the YMCA has succeeded in reaching a number of these “wild” youth through Hi-Y Clubs or down-to-earth forms of group work. We could call attention to the detached workers program of the Chicago YMCA, where skilled secretaries are separated from regular YMCA operations to work with gangs in their own environments. We could point to the need of Y leaders to sit down more often with representatives of other agencies to see how each organization can make its own contribution to a community-wide program directed toward the increasing number of young people who do not know how to make constructive use of their free time. Here we shall not deal with techniques but with the basic perspective of a Christian Association.

NEW PERSPECTIVES: A SUMMARY

At the Triennial Conference of the North American Association of Secretaries in Philadelphia in 1963 two addresses were given by George H. Webber, one of the ministers of the East Harlem Parish in New York City where Protestants have been struggling to make the church relevant to the staggering problems of the inner city.²³ What he said gives some clues to the revolution that will have to take place in the approach of many YMCAs if they are to make any dent in the no-man's land of the unchurched and the don't-want-to-be-churched. What follows is in part a digest of Webber's remarks and in part an adaptation to the YMCA situation in a larger context stimulated by his presentation. At the same time these few paragraphs may serve as a summary of much that has been said in this and preceding chapters.

- A simple moralistic approach that does not take into account the dynamics of life in the inner city and the suburbs will not work. These young people are not going to be preached at by adults who have not lived close enough to them to know the kind of pressures youth live under and the kind of concrete decisions they have to make.

- An institutional approach is not enough. If we wait for people to come into our buildings, we reach only those who respond easily to our program and leave great numbers untouched. A building should be like the headquarters of an army behind the lines—a place to sally out from, a haven to withdraw to and plan new strategy, perhaps a meeting place for those who have been "recruited" on some street corner or playing field.

- The Christian is one who stands in the midst of the world as a servant. He does not take Christ to the world, introducing him as a stranger. God is already at work in the world. We find where he is at work both by studying the Bible and by reading the morning newspaper. The Christian seeks to live alongside his fellows in their world, not as a

“professional” but as another human being capable of listening and loving.

- The Christian is ready not only to respond to the needs of individuals but to join in efforts to change the social structure that so often breeds delinquency and despair. He is not only a Good Samaritan: he helps make plans to outwit the thieves that threaten travelers on the way to Jericho. This may mean going into politics, even though it is not easy to reconcile the fight for human justice with the commandment to love one's neighbor.

- The Christian will try to create small, meaningful fellowship groups in which embattled individuals will find the kind of comradeship which sustains and enriches them instead of exploiting and boring them. Older persons will be encouraged to join some group that is working for the improvement of conditions in the community, as a token that they are ready to take some responsibility beyond their own needs. Whenever there is a favorable opening, the Association leader will encourage an individual to relate himself to a church or synagogue, preferably one to which he or his family is already connected by tradition.

- It may be weeks or months before the Christian servant-leader at work in no-man's land talks about religion. He will be slow to attach an explicit Christian label to the enterprise. What is of prime importance is his speaking the truth in love and thereby demonstrating the integrity of his involvement with his young friends in their own living situation. But when the time is ripe he will not hesitate to speak of the faith to which he is committed and to introduce those biblical insights which may be relevant to his friends' interests and needs.

- And so, whether we are thinking of persons of other faiths or of no faith, we come back to the point of communication. When we who are working in and through the Christian Association have once identified ourselves suffi-

ciently with others to be able to enter into a real conversation about things that matter most, what do we have to say? We exercise our true freedom as Christians in a pluralist society when we learn how to communicate our convictions in humble confidence.

- The dominant note of the YMCA's approach to youth in a pluralist society should be positive, without dodging sharp differences of viewpoint or denying the reality of evil. The characteristic emphasis of a Christian leader is on what a person may become when he accepts and appropriates the rich resources for a full life which are ever made available by a gracious God.

We need the good news of what God is, what God has done and still will do; we do not need the bad news of human failure, wickedness, frustration, evil-doing. We need to hear more about what men may be, what in the divine purpose they really are, what by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ they may become. . . . That is to say, we need the gospel.²⁴

Notes for Chapter 6

¹ M. M. Thomas, *Religion and Society*, Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, Bangalore, India, Vol. IX, March, 1962, p. 20.

² From *An American Dialogue* by Gustave Weigel and Robert McAfee Brown. Copyright ©1960 by Gustave Weigel and Robert McAfee Brown. Reprinted by permission of Doubleday & Company, Inc., pp. 10, 11.

³ *From State Church to Pluralism* (New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1962), pp. 167-169.

⁴ "America's Four Conspiracies," *Religion in America*, John Cogley, ed. (Cleveland, Ohio: World Publishing Co., 1958).

⁵ *An American Dialogue*, *op. cit.*, pp. 11, 12.

⁶ *Religion and American Society*, Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, The Fund for the Republic, Inc., Box 4068, Santa Barbara, Calif., pp. 23, 31, 74-76. By permission.

⁷ See W. Norman Pittenger, *Proclaiming Christ Today* (New York: Seabury Press, Inc., 1962), p. 84.

⁸ Colossians 1:17 (NEB).

⁹ Acts 14: 15-17 (NEB).

¹⁰ W. A. Visser 't Hooft, *No Other Name* (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1963), p. 118.

¹¹ Gerald B. Cooke, *As Christians Face Rival Religions* (New York: Association Press, 1962), p. 169.

¹² From a paper, "Hinduism and Christianity," presented to a World Student Christian Federation Conference, Bangalore, India, 1961.

¹³ Raymond Pannikar, "Common Grounds for Christian-Non-Christian Collaboration," *Religion and Society*, Vol. V, March, 1958, pp. 33, 35. By permission of the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society.

¹⁴ I Peter 3:15 (NEB).

¹⁵ *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*, *op. cit.*, p. 212.

¹⁶ II Corinthians 5:19 (NEB).

¹⁷ "Religious Pluralism: a Jewish View," *Theology Today*, Vol. XIX, Jan., 1963, pp. 510, 511.

¹⁸ *Religion in America*, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

¹⁹ Gerald B. Cooke, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

²⁰ Lesslie Newbigin, *A Faith for This One World?* (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1961). By permission of Harper & Row, Publishers, Incorporated.

²¹ Father Walter J. Ong, "The Religious-Secular Dialogue," *Religion in America*, John Cogley, ed. (Cleveland, Ohio: World Publishing Co., 1958), pp. 190-191, 206-207.

²² Robert Wallace, "Where's the Party—Let's Crash It," *Life Magazine*, July 5, 1963. By permission.

²³ See *Forum*, Association of Secretaries, July-Aug., 1963, pp. 37-47.

²⁴ W. Norman Pittenger, *Proclaiming Christ Today* (New York: Seabury Press, Inc., 1962), p. 66.

7

**THE
YMCA
IN
WORLD
PERSPECTIVE**

Many YMCAs in the United States manage to go about their business with only marginal attention to the world setting in which their enterprise is being carried on. Occasionally, and especially during the week or two when YMCA members engage in a World Service campaign, they are reminded that they belong to a world movement. But ordinarily both members and leaders are engrossed in the affairs of the local Association. A few representatives attend area and national meetings and give consideration to wider issues confronting the movement and the world, but how to relate the people "back home" to these broader concerns is a persistent problem.

This problem of course is not confined to the YMCA. It is faced by leaders of churches too. In spite of the wide attention to ecumenical developments given by the secular and religious press there is no observable ground swell of deep interest in the ecumenical movement among members of local churches. Parochialism is the despair of the small minority in any American organization who are trying to maintain a world-wide outlook.

"Poverty in the midst of plenty" is a paradox that applies to world-mindedness as truly as to economic affairs. The world impinges on us personally on every hand. News of the world faces us on the front page of the daily paper. It intrudes into our living room, is made vivid through television. Threats to peace are a subject of discussion around the dinner table as well as the conference table. Most Americans "see red" when China or Cuba is mentioned. The cost of armament reaches into our pocketbooks deeply. The plans of our young people are interrupted by the demands of military training.

And yet the world for most of us most of the time in America remains remote. Somehow we feel only like spectators in a drama. Our real interests are personal and local. We do not feel really caught up in world affairs. And even though travel to other countries is becoming a commonplace, most of us quickly slip back into a parochial point of

view. "The Americans cross the continents but discover little of the world," writes a young French pastor who recently made his first trip to the United States. "This is the profound crisis of a country which grew too quickly, which succeeded too well, materially speaking, and which on one side knows the loneliness of the rich and on the other side finds itself faced with responsibilities for which it is not ready."¹

And this, we dare say, is the paradox also of the YMCAs of America. The writer took part in a regional YMCA gathering where 200 men and women discussed at some length putting the Christian purpose of the YMCA into practice in various aspects of Association program. One would never have guessed from this week-end conference that these YMCAs are part of a world movement. With the exception of a few members of Y's Men's Clubs no one mentioned the international YMCA network and no concern for world problems came to the surface. Some might excuse this oversight by saying that such matters were not specifically on the agenda or that time was lacking to get around to the international situation. But in fact from the standpoint of Christian faith a world outlook should be inherent in every aspect of YMCA program and the perspective of belonging to a world movement should make a difference *at every point*.

In this chapter we shall explore the richness of resources at the disposal of the YMCAs of the United States by virtue of their partnership in a world-wide YMCA movement. This will lead us back to many aspects of the role of a lay Christian movement that have been discussed in earlier chapters, but this time we shall seek to see them more consciously in a world perspective.

THE YMCA's CHRISTIAN BASIS IN WORLD PERSPECTIVE

One main line of our inquiry has been an effort to clarify the Christian basis of a Young Men's Christian Association in a world come of age, which among other things is a religi-

ously pluralistic world. A look at the world-wide YMCA movement adds complexity to this study but also reveals the basis on which unity has been maintained amid this diversity for more than 100 years.

Americans who are accustomed to think of the YMCA as completely independent from all churches organizationally are often puzzled by the close relationship of the YMCA in some countries to one particular church. This situation will be found especially in Europe. The YMCAs of Norway, for example, are in effect a part of the youth work of the Church of Norway (Lutheran). In spite of this confessional identification, however, membership in the YMCA is open to persons belonging to other Christian confessions. The YMCA has supported the ecumenical policy of the World Alliance of YMCAs and in recent years has exerted a general ecumenical influence within the Church of Norway. In Greece a relationship exists which is similar in many ways, since the YMCA there functions within the framework of the Greek Orthodox Church. This is in harmony with a principle agreed upon in 1928, 1930 and 1933 when World Alliance representatives met with responsible leaders of the Eastern Orthodox Churches. The central principle of these agreements was as follows: "While recognizing the independence and autonomy of the YMCA, it is understood that in predominantly Orthodox countries the work of the YMCA should be conducted in harmony with the principles of the Orthodox Church and in consultation with its leaders."

In most countries of Europe and on other continents, however, especially where religious pluralism prevails, the characteristic YMCA pattern is one of independence from all churches. In some instances the YMCA is identified more or less closely with Protestantism, but in a few cases the orientation is Orthodox or Roman Catholic. The clearest example of the latter is the union of a small number of Polish YMCAs which still maintain their separate existence in Western Europe. Another illustration is in Italy, where the large majority of members and leaders are Catholics. The General

Secretary of the YMCAs of Italy has expressed publicly the hope that Catholic members through their contact with the YMCA may gain "a more developed sense of real Christian charity."²

YMCAs in Africa run almost the whole gamut of diversity in church relationships. In Ethiopia the YMCA movement works in close collaboration with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. In French-speaking countries the YMCA tends to be sponsored by the Protestant churches. In English-speaking lands the YMCA is not under ecclesiastical supervision and seeks to maintain a cordial relationship with all churches.

Even though the YMCAs of a particular country may be identified clearly with one confession or another, it has been the deliberate policy of the World Alliance for some years to maintain an interconfessional position and to foster an ecumenical outlook in all Member Movements. This is clearly stated in a paragraph from a report generally approved by the World Council in 1957:

The YMCA is interdenominational and ecumenical in fact and interconfessional in intention and desire. Its membership is made up of persons adhering to various Christian confessions and denominations. It is a generally accepted principle of the YMCA that its members endeavour to live and achieve the purposes of the Movement in accordance with the teachings and spirit of the church to which they belong without seeking or desiring to change the church affiliation of their fellow-members.³

Many other resolutions of World Alliance bodies could be quoted. One of the most significant actions was a directive in 1953 to Member Movements stating that national constitutions should be consistent with the established interconfessional policy of the World Alliance. Equally important are demonstrations in practice. Three times the World Alliance has encouraged or sponsored meetings of YMCA Roman Catholic leaders in order to exchange experiences and give assurance of a full share in the privileges and responsibilities of the movement. A somewhat similar conference with Orthodox leaders has been proposed. Several

times in its own meetings the World Alliance has made provision for participation by leaders of all three confessions on the platform and in the conduct of Bible study and corporate devotions. The significance of the joint consultation with the World YWCA in 1962 dealing with the ecumenical policy and practice of lay Christian movements has already been referred to. A guide for the study of ecumenical questions has been prepared for all National Movements.⁴

Recognition by the American YMCAs that they belong to this kind of world movement helps to provide a corrective to the close identification with Protestantism which has been the dominant pattern in the United States. It should also give them insight into the complexities of current issues in YMCA-church relationships. But, most important of all, it should reveal to them the possibility of that more positive and fruitful type of relationship to the churches of all confessions which seems to lie ahead.

Perhaps the YMCAs of the United States can learn even more from the experience of those Associations in other countries which are functioning in an environment where other than Christian faiths are dominant. From Cairo to Tokyo there are YMCA movements which have become firmly rooted in a setting which might have been regarded as unfavorable to a Christian Association. Often the number of Muslim, Hindu, or Buddhist participants in YMCA classes, sports events, and youth clubs exceed by far the Christians. In student hostels Christians are almost always in the minority and in YMCA homes for street boys scarcely any Christian boy is to be found. Yet there has never been any attempt to remove the word "Christian" from the name and substitute "Religious," nor to camouflage the Christian purpose of the Association.

These YMCAs in Asia and Africa seem to have an answer to the question raised more than once in these pages: How can a YMCA be inclusive with regard to religious affiliation and still maintain its integrity as a Christian Association? But

aspects of this answer which are not easy to achieve in the United States. One is a matter of membership policy. YMCAs in lands where Christians are a minority invariably have a dual membership system; that is, they distinguish between full and associate members. Only full members are eligible for election to the board of directors and only full members can become YMCA secretaries. And only Christians, usually of any confession, can become full members. There is one YMCA in Asia which is an exception to this common practice, but its provision that 25 per cent of the board members can be other than Christians seems to have caused more difficulty than if it required all to be Christians. For reasons that will be dealt with in the next chapter most YMCAs in the United States are unwilling to adopt a dual membership plan.

The second point relates to a staunchness of faith. When Christians are in a minority position, they tend to be more articulate about their faith and more firmly grounded in it than those in a country where Christianity as a tradition is taken for granted. Even though the various denominations have been transplanted, often artificially, from the West to the Orient, in the "younger" churches there is less deviation from the main stream of Christian faith than one will find in the United States. In other words, Christians in Asia and the Middle East tend to be more orthodox in the best sense, and those who are in the YMCA consequently have less difficulty in putting theological and ethical content into the term Christian.

One must of course be realistic about these YMCAs of Asia and Africa. There are some Christians there too whose faith is only nominal. There are some who succumb to a mood of easy tolerance and evade real dialogue with their friends in the YMCA who are not Christian. But on the whole the Christian witness of the YMCAs of the so-called non-Christian world has been genuine both in word and deed, with the result that the Association movement in general is held in high favor there, because of its service to

youth, by many who are adherents of other faiths.

Thus far we have used the term "evangelism" sparingly because of its varied connotations. Evangelism is not to be confused with proselytism. The latter term has come to have a bad connotation, implying an effort to change the religious affiliation of another person by taking advantage of the immaturity of the convert. But evangelism in its true meaning is a communication of the Good News, which may be by living example as well as by spoken word. A YMCA secretary from Ceylon has written a graduate thesis on the evangelistic role of the YMCA in his country, where more than 50 per cent of YMCA members are Buddhists, Hindus, or Muslims. He points out that the effectiveness of preaching in the churches has often been limited by a lack of practical service to the multireligious community. But the role of the YMCA in Ceylon is to show forth the love of God in Christ by the program it offers to non-Christians. It is his experience that when the YMCA is not ambiguous about its purpose it gains more respect from those of other faiths than "if it watered down its Christian emphasis." The YMCA in Ceylon has certain advantages as compared with the churches, because non-Christians are within its membership, it is an ecumenical lay movement, and its program can be more flexible than that of the churches. The YMCA can therefore be an important partner in the total evangelistic effort. But there is no thought of imposing the gospel. All members of the YMCA should be encouraged to think more deeply about their faith. The claims of Christian faith are to be presented "in a spirit of earnest reverent inquiry." Here is an illustration of the forthright approach to Christian witness which some Associations in other lands are making, while maintaining an open door to persons of other religious traditions.⁵

A FRESH LOOK AT THE PARIS BASIS⁶

145 Against this background one is better prepared to understand the high regard with which the *Paris Basis* is held by

YMCAs in all parts of the world. Adopted by the First World's Conference of YMCAs at Paris in 1855 and reaffirmed in 1905 and 1955, the "fundamental principle" of this Basis is as follows:

The Young Men's Christian Associations seek to unite those young men who, regarding Jesus Christ as their God and Savior according to the Holy Scriptures, desire to be His disciples in their faith and in their life, and to associate their efforts for the extension of His Kingdom amongst young men.

The officers of all Member Movements are required to certify that the "work and witness" of their organization are in accord with the fundamental principle of the Paris Basis. Strictly speaking, this is not a statement of purpose to which individuals or local Associations are asked to subscribe, although some National Councils make such acceptance a requirement for full membership. Rather, it is a basis for the affiliation of Member Movements with the World Alliance of YMCAs. This brief statement formulated by young men more than one hundred years ago has provided a remarkable bond of unity among YMCA movements which vary greatly as to program, organization, and religious tradition.

Strangely, the Paris Basis seems never to have been at the center of attention of the YMCAs of the United States, although representatives from North America supported its adoption in 1855. Probably the National Council of YMCAs in this country is the only Member Movement that does not even refer to the Paris Basis in its constitution. It has been proposed that it would be appropriate to make a fresh study of this historic statement as part of the ongoing reconsideration of the Christian purpose of the movement.

The reasons for this proposal can be stated very briefly:

1. *The Paris Basis is a relatively simple statement which places the YMCA in the main stream of Christian tradition.* It records the central conviction of the supreme revelation of God in Jesus Christ. This would be equally true if the phrase "Lord and Savior" were used, which many feel would

be closer to New Testament language. The basic medium for this revelation is the Bible.

2. *The Paris Basis puts the emphasis on discipleship.* To be a disciple in both faith and life combines the elements of learning and doing, belief and action, faith and service in a way congenial to a lay movement.

3. *The Paris Basis stresses an outreach to others in the interest of the Kingdom.* Here are no closed circles of believers but groups pledged to work together for the extension of the rule of God in the lives of other persons and in society.

4. *The Paris Basis opens the way for ecumenical endeavor.* Just because it does not specify a relationship to any particular church, it can be accepted by Roman Catholics and Orthodox as well as Protestants, not as a full statement of Christian faith but as the basis for a Christian Association seeking to serve all churches.

No one would want to exalt the Paris Basis to the level of a creed nor to claim that any historic statement of this kind can express the full purpose of a movement for all time. But the simplicity of phrasing of this statement still speaks to modern youth and the flexibility with which it can be interpreted has made it possible for persons from widely different cultural and theological backgrounds to find here the basis for unity.

YMCA SERVICE IN WORLD PERSPECTIVE

Brief reference was made in an earlier chapter to service as one expression of a Christian social concern. It was said that YMCAs are not notably successful in enlisting young people and adults in forms of service outside the immediate needs of the local Association. Here is another point at which belonging to a world movement offers a resource of incalculable value.

The membership of the YMCAs of the United States is considerably larger than that of all other Associations in the world put together. In fact, it comes close to being two-

thirds of the total registered membership.⁷ In terms of the money and manpower available to YMCAs of this country, there is simply no comparison. Several of the largest city or metropolitan Associations in the United States have more resources of this kind than an entire National Movement elsewhere, with the few exceptions of Canada, the United Kingdom, and two or three countries on the Continent of Europe.

No wonder that so often other movements look to the United States—or the International Committee, which coordinates the overseas service of the YMCAs of the United States and Canada—for aid in meeting the urgent needs of their Associations for better facilities and more experienced leaders. No wonder that the World Service of these two North American movements often seems to overshadow similar efforts of other movements, even though the contributions of the latter in some cases are higher in proportion to their more limited resources. No wonder that some of the less developed movements tend to look upon the YMCAs of the United States as a beneficent Santa Claus who can respond generously to every request. Our purpose here is not to appraise the total enterprise of intermovement aid or to deal with the role of the World Alliance in this realm, but to call attention to the tremendous channel for Christian service which is available to the YMCAs of the United States because of their membership in a world movement.

The response of the American Associations to this opportunity is a thrilling story which has been told often and need not be repeated here. We simply list a few highlights: the ingenuity in organizing World Service, so that all but a small percentage of Associations throughout the country are involved; the dramatic methods of promotion, catching the imagination of youth as well as adults; the remarkable success in reaching goals measured in millions of dollars, both for the regular annual giving and for such special projects as Buildings for Brotherhood; the devoted service of a large company of fraternal secretaries and their families, who

sometimes spend their entire professional life abroad; the involvement of a large number of American lay leaders through the International Committee in a serious study of the needs and opportunities of YMCAs in other lands; and the fruitful interchange of visits back and forth of laymen and secretaries from America and other countries, leading to rich sharing of experience and conviction.

In spite of these achievements in World Service, which surpass in extent and efficiency the efforts of any other national movement, many local leaders are far from recognizing the place of such service as an integral part of the life and work of a Christian Association. The raising of money for World Service may be concentrated for practical reasons into a short period—some have even made it an intensive effort for one day—but in a broader sense this is not a special project but a major interest for every week of the year. One member of the staff may be asked to carry special responsibility for World Service organization and interpretation, but in fact every secretary shares in this responsibility. The primary aim locally should not be the reaching of a specific financial goal—this might be done through a few large givers—but to secure the participation of every member in the enterprise. This may appear to be sheer idealism in the light of the limited interest of masses of members in Association affairs, but there is no better way to enlarge the concept of membership than by involvement in World Service. One-third or more of the money now raised for this purpose comes through the work of young people 18 years of age and younger, and this is one of the joys of the project. But this is not to be regarded as “kid stuff”; it is a matter of serious endeavor for every member of the board and its committees.

We need to take a second look also at the deeper meaning of service from a Christian point of view. One might take part in a World Service campaign without any real sense of social responsibility. It might be a chore or a gesture or a stunt. What is needed in the perspective of the gospel is a

genuine desire to share with a brother in need, with no thought of praise but out of gratitude for one's own material and spiritual blessings. Service in the New Testament meaning is more than humanitarian activity; it is an action indicating a desire to serve God in gratitude and it thereby binds one in solidarity with his neighbor, wherever in the world he may be. In a highly organized campaign it is not easy to maintain this personal awareness of the act of sharing. On the other hand, participation in World Service, not only as a project but as an ongoing interest, is for many YMCA members probably their most genuine expression of Christian responsibility. In many YMCAs of the United States, World Service is the most explicitly religious activity of the year. What an Association gives through World Service is important, but what it may receive through a release from self-centeredness is of priceless value.

But to see YMCA service in world perspective one must also grasp the involvement of the local Association in a world-wide partnership in which the act of giving is only one element in the picture. When one national movement gives money or men to another movement within the World Alliance, this should not be an indication of the dependence of the YMCAs of one country upon those of another but a mark of their interdependence within a brotherhood. It is a great temptation for a large and rich YMCA movement through its giving to determine the destiny of a movement across the sea. Hence YMCA leaders of the United States are coming to realize that the World Alliance is not only a useful channel for international contact and a valuable agency for co-ordination, but an indispensable network of relationships for achieving a responsible partnership. The term Extension which was formerly used to indicate the establishing and strengthening of YMCA movements in other parts of the world is giving way to Intermovement Aid, which implies that there is an element of mutual service. Every movement within the World Alliance, no matter how small, has something to give to the total enterprise; every

movement, no matter how strong, has something to receive.

In these days of rapid and vivid communication there is an abundance of materials telling the story of World Service: graphic leaflets, striking pictures, lively films. Available also is *World Communiqué*, the bi-monthly pictorial journal of the World Alliance, which is well-nigh indispensable for those who want to keep abreast of YMCA events around the world. But in addition to such media prepared for those who feel they must read while they run there is the small booklet prepared with care each year in Geneva to aid observance of the World YMCA-YWCA Week of Prayer. Although many American Associations distribute this booklet and arrange special gatherings during the second week in November, on the whole the World Week of Prayer is observed more seriously in many other countries than in the United States. Yet to join with YMCA friends across the sea in prayer is to add depth to World Service undertakings. Here perhaps is the ultimate test of whether we see our local Associations in world perspective.

EDUCATION FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN WORLD PERSPECTIVE

National leaders have given serious consideration to the role of the YMCAs of the United States in educating for social responsibility on the national and international level. There is no lack of program aids in this field.⁸ But one must confess that advance toward this goal is slow. We are still looking for a "breakthrough" which will elicit a positive and consistent response from Associations across the country. Again we turn to membership in a world YMCA movement as one of the major resources for such a breakthrough.

In part this advance is to be found in a fuller utilization of the educational possibilities inherent in World Service. The usefulness of education centered around projects is well recognized. Perhaps only one out of ten persons is reached through more formal processes of education on international affairs, which go deeply into principles and give a

thorough orientation to the complexities of the world scene. The other nine are more likely to respond to concrete projects related to a specific situation in another country, dramatized through personal contacts. World Service provides a built-in opportunity for such project education. In some thirty countries fraternal secretaries from the United States or Canada are at work, providing a personal link with the home base. No doubt many YMCA members gain a clearer understanding of particular situations in Africa, Asia, and Latin America through World Service channels than through reading the daily papers or listening to general lectures.

But there must be education in depth if American young people and adults are to go beyond the sporadic and sometimes incidental learnings that come from participation in projects. There must be more than propaganda for the purpose of promotion; information must not be directed primarily to the building up of the YMCA as an institution. The aim should be to give insight into the social and religious setting in which the YMCA is at work. The more sentimental stories of individual need—poverty, illiteracy, or what-not—must not be overdrawn; the aim should be also to show the positive forces working for reconstruction, of which the YMCA is a part. Solutions must not be oversimplified; the YMCA is not likely alone to save the world! Whenever possible there should be contacts with citizens of other countries now in the United States: university students, YMCA visitors on traveling fellowships, occasionally diplomatic representatives.

All this is calculated to give the American a truer and more realistic understanding of the situation abroad and to stir him to action, not only in the giving of money through the YMCA but in exercising his responsibility as a United States citizen with regard to such questions as technical assistance to foreign countries and policies regarding East-West relationships. The increasing desire to integrate World Service with education on international affairs is one of the

most hopeful developments in the American movement today as far as Christian action in world affairs is concerned.

But of course World Service is only one aspect of the involvement of American YMCAs in a world movement. Both as a national YMCA movement and through their membership in the World Alliance the Associations of the United States may come to recognize more vividly their responsibility toward the United Nations and its specialized agencies such as UNESCO, UNICEF, and WHO. The World Alliance is one of the international nongovernmental organizations holding consultative status in the United Nations through the Economic and Social Council. Representatives of the World Alliance maintain close contact with UN bodies in New York, Geneva, and elsewhere. A small number of American YMCA leaders take advantage of the United Nations Seminar which is held under YMCA auspices each year in New York. But it is safe to say that relatively few local Association leaders give serious attention to education about the United Nations. There is a wave of misguided opposition in the United States toward the United Nations which should not be taken lightly. Cars move through the streets of some cities with such signs as: "Keep US out of UN and UN out of US." Extremist political and religious groups denounce the United Nations as Communist-inspired or an idolatrous political creation. Racists take a dim view of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The World Council of YMCAs is on record as giving general support to the United Nations both in its efforts to maintain peace in a world split into blocs and in its energetic work for human welfare in nations undergoing rapid development. YMCA leaders who take their responsibility in a world movement seriously will give education about the work of the United Nations a much higher priority, recognizing that this issue is of direct concern to local Associations.

If this were a program manual we could give illustrations of other special YMCA projects in international education such as YMCA Assemblies on "Youth and our Nation's

Goals" and workshops on "Citizenship Education." We could call attention to the important contribution of Y's Men's Clubs through their International Association. We could describe international seminars of the Industrial Management Clubs. We could comment on the growing number of international YMCA contacts through travel, international work camps, and so on. But underlying all these specifics is the simple realization that members of the American YMCA belong to a world movement which consists of persons of different nationalities, races, and religious traditions. Inherent in this world-wide relationship is a unique opportunity to recognize their wider social responsibility as Christians.

One illustration deserves special comment because it shows a type of program with international repercussions that is available to every Association located near a large college or university. This is the International Fellowship organized by the Central Branch of the Milwaukee YMCA, through which this Association is maintaining lively contact with literally hundreds of students from other countries. The statement of purpose of this Fellowship reflects the far-reaching values of such a program.⁹ In this connection the work of the YMCA's Committee on Friendly Relations with Foreign Students merits high praise.¹⁰

In recent decades notable progress has been made in drawing local Associations toward a clearer recognition of their international relationships and responsibilities. Yet those who have spent some years abroad in YMCA service become convinced that the YMCAs of the United States are even now tapping only a fraction of the resources inherent in their belonging to a world-wide lay Christian movement. Here is another new perspective for the American YMCA.

Members of the YMCA in this country become truly aware of their interdependence when they see how much they can learn from friends overseas. Early in January, 1963, delegates to the First All-Africa Christian Youth Assembly, among whom were many YMCA representatives, made a declara-

tion which serves as well as any statement we know to express the outlook of young Christians who are strong in their faith and are thereby committed to courageous witness in the world:

We affirm ourselves to be African Christians. To be a Christian in this time and place means to be fully engaged in the whole of African life. Following Jesus Christ our first task is to identify ourselves with all men, to seek to serve them, and to love them. . . . We young people intend to press forward in the power of His Spirit who alone can renew the life of the Church. . . . As young Christians we have a special responsibility and special opportunity to witness to our contemporaries. Therefore we pray God to help us present the Gospel relevantly, meaningfully and powerfully to our generation. We realize that our most effective witness is through our daily life in the secular world. We request the elders of our churches [and YMCAs] to help us in equipping ourselves for the task of witness as young laity in the world.

Notes for Chapter 7

¹ Jean-Paul Meyer, "Return from America," *Intercollegian*, March, 1963, pp. 16-18.

² More details about the situation in Norway and Italy will be found in the report of the Third Council of YMCAs, 1961, *Called to New Things*, pp. 60-65.

³ *The YMCA, the Church and Christian Unity*, pamphlet (Geneva, Switzerland: World Alliance of YMCAs, 1957).

⁴ *Basic Issues in YMCA Ecumenical Policy and Practice* (Geneva: World Alliance of YMCAs, 1962).

⁵ Ravanel Weinman, *The Role of the YMCA in the Evangelistic Task of the Church in Ceylon*, Union Theological Seminary, New York, 1963.

⁶ A more detailed treatment of this topic by the author will be found in the *National Council Bulletin*, Jan.-Feb., 1963.

⁷ For world membership figures, see *Called to New Things*, *op. cit.*, pp. 321-322.

⁸ See *National Council Bulletin* supplement, "Programming for International Understanding," April, 1961.

⁹ Ivan Springstead, "That All May Be One," *Forum*, AOS of North America, Sept.-Oct., 1963, p. 49.

¹⁰ The name of this organization has now been changed to International Student Service.

Enterprising reporters often ask how many members there are in YMCAs around the world. Any honest answer must be hedged about with so many reservations that it will seem evasive, for there are no generally accepted rules for deciding who shall be counted as YMCA members. In the United States, for example, a Y-Indian Guide seven years old is counted as a member of a local Association, but in few other National Movements are children under 12 regarded as members. Women and girls are regularly included in YMCA membership lists in the United States, but not in certain other countries. Moreover, the precision of reporting in statistically conscious America is far greater than in many other movements, which may give their membership count in round figures.

But much more is at stake here than statistical accuracy. The term "member" has such varied connotations in YMCA circles that one almost despairs of arriving at a valid definition or description. Sometimes the meaning of membership is explained in terms of fees and privileges; in another context, in relation to support and control of the Association; from still a different angle, with reference to the growth and responsibility of the individual. Membership in the YMCA may involve only a casual and brief contact with the organization, or it may lead to a long-time commitment of deep significance. Here is a question with which leaders of

YMCA Membership and Movement

YMCAs—and churches, too—have been wrestling for many years. The problem has been accentuated as the YMCA becomes a complex institution in an urban society.

In this chapter we are seeking to develop a concept of membership which will be in keeping with the avowed Christian purpose of the YMCA and relevant to the particular demands and opportunities of these times. This objective will lead us to examine such practical questions as the varying categories of membership, growth in the experience of membership, and ways of maintaining a firm Christian basis within a diverse and inclusive constituency. It will lead us to consider also the possibility of making the YMCA a more dynamic force in the community through a forward-looking membership policy. A sentence from a study of "This Matter of Belonging" in 1946 may serve as a "text" for our approach. This committee declared that what was needed was not just another legislative action by the National Council but "*a basic reorientation of the whole conception of member affiliation that will be appropriate to the obligations and responsibilities of the Young Men's Christian Association in the new age.*"

A BLURRED MEMBERSHIP PICTURE

157 Thanks to the Research and Planning Department, a detailed analysis is available year after year of the membership

and constituency of the YMCAs of the United States. At the end of 1962 a total of 2,885,706 members was reported, which represents a gain of 56.8 per cent since 1950. If all those were counted who held membership at some time during the year, the count would be over 4,000,000. There is evidence of a slight slowing down in the rapid increase registered over the past decade.

In addition, over 399,000 "nonregistered members" were reported in 1962. These are persons who participated in some aspect of YMCA program but who for one reason or another were not registered as members. Studies of YMCA constituency have shown that there is very little distinction in fact between the persons reported in this category and those who are listed as members, because of a rather wide variation in the interpretation of terms.

Another blur in the picture appears when we look at the figures regarding turnover. Of the total number of different members enrolled in 1962, 44 per cent did not renew their membership during the calendar year. One may safely conclude from these and other studies that two out of five persons tend to hold membership in the YMCAs of the United States for less than a year. This lack of continuity is a matter of grave concern from the standpoint of any effective impact of the YMCA on individuals. It is obvious that for many persons membership in the YMCA is a transient and temporary experience, indicating that they join for a brief period to take advantage of certain privileges rather than out of any clear sense of belonging to a movement.

The annual figures show a marked trend toward a lowering of the age of YMCA members in the United States. In 1962 there were close to 700,000 boys and girls under 12 years of age who were counted as members, or slightly more than 25 per cent of the total. This figure has increased about 125 per cent since 1950. Reflected here is a rapid growth in the number of Y-Indian Guides as well as an increase in family membership. The 12-to-14 age group makes up another

12 per cent of the total. Such facts indicate an increasing emphasis in the United States on YMCA service to children below secondary school age. A strong defense can be made for this type of work with younger age groups, but it is clear that from 25 to 37 per cent of the large YMCA membership in the United States are too young to be expected to participate in policy making for the Association as a whole.

The relatively small number of young adult male members aged 18 to 30 in the YMCAs of the United States has been viewed with concern for some years. In 1962 there were only about 300,000 young men in the 18-29 category, approximately 11 per cent of the total membership. The decline in this age group is disconcerting to those who have been accustomed to think of young men as the heart of the Young Men's Christian Association. By way of contrast it may be noted that about 25 per cent of all male members of the American YMCAs are 35 years of age and over, confirming that the membership in this country is heavily weighted at the upper and lower age ranges. Adding to the confusion of the picture, so far as the public image of the YMCA is concerned, is the fact that women and girls now make up about 25 per cent of the total membership of the YMCAs in the United States.

FACTORS AFFECTING YMCA MEMBERSHIP POLICIES

When one probes behind these figures and takes into account certain basic factors which have influenced the development of the YMCA movement in the United States, the reasons for the blurred picture of YMCA membership become clearer. Some of these factors may have positive value for the future, but all of them throw light on the problems which face those YMCA leaders who are striving for a membership policy more in accord with the new demands and opportunities confronting Christian Associations in America today.

- Emphasis on the local autonomy of American YMCAs has encouraged a wide latitude in membership policies. In

1933 the National Council gave up any effort to establish conditions for member affiliation by stating that each local Association shall determine the qualifications of its voting members, providing that such decisions are in accord with the purpose and spirit of the YMCA. In 1952 the National Council adopted a very broad definition of a YMCA member:

Member: A person who agrees to co-operate with others in the accomplishment of the Young Men's Christian Associations' accepted purpose, recognizes the fact that membership embraces all types of members and involves identification with a world-wide fellowship, and, after due application, is individually enrolled in the Association.

Within a decentralized structure of this kind, no matter how strongly the National Council may urge certain membership policies, such as racial integration, the final authority for decision rests with the local Association. By way of comparison it may be noted that the National Convention of YWCAs of the United States has defined 12 years as the lowest limit for membership, has specified that men and boys may not be YMCA members, and has set the amount of shared dues to the national organization to be expected from every member.¹

- For decades now the YMCAs of the United States have extended their services ever more widely in the community. Parents have pressed for increased attention to programs with younger children. Women and girls have been welcomed into a variety of activities, in response to their request to use YMCA facilities. Many Associations have developed work with management groups and industrial workers with some modification of usual membership procedures. Occasionally trained leaders have sought out youth groups in the community without any effort in the initial stages to recruit members for the YMCA. In short, the YMCA net has been cast far and wide and in this outreach it has seemed wise often to depart from earlier membership patterns.

- All voluntary associations are feeling the impact of the depersonalization which is characteristic of an industrialized society. The close ties which were normal in a craft guild, for example, have been replaced by the large-scale organization of the labor union. In many large organizations today the majority of members are content to pay their dues and let a few persons in the inner circle determine policies. The moving of families so frequently from one job to another has made it impossible to maintain the closely knit ties of the earlier community. As associations become more complex the relationship between members is bound to become more formal and nominal. In a large city YMCA only a few persons can be familiar with the whole range of Association activities and committees. As the YMCA becomes a large institution the role of the individual member is likely to undergo a marked change.

One further illustration of this trend is the reluctance of many older youth and young adults to get involved in an organization. They prefer to be "free wheeling," taking advantage of programs that interest them without being tied down to ongoing responsibility. This tendency has been particularly noticeable in European countries, where the membership of YMCAs has not grown markedly even though many more youth are being reached. But a similar attitude was found in the recent study of young adults carried on by the National Council of YMCAs in the United States. Young men and women want to be unhampered; they prefer informal contacts. "They want to belong, but not to be involved except on their own terms."

- American YMCAs have put a strong emphasis on expecting every member to pay a substantial portion of the cost of services. This is due to the pressure of rising costs and the regulations of federated financing. It is based also on the desire to make the local Association self-supporting as far as possible, reflecting the characteristic American policy of pay-as-you-go and avoiding any suggestion of a hand-

out. It is easy to understand how this worthy objective has sometimes led to an overstress on the financial aspects of YMCA membership, as if the success of every project could be measured by the amount of income it produces. Under these circumstances it is hard for the ordinary member to make any real distinction between paying for privileges and joining the YMCA for a more basic purpose.

- The religious inclusiveness of the American YMCA constituency has sometimes led to an issue regarding membership policy. In some communities Roman Catholic priests have said that they have no objection to the participation by young Catholics in specific YMCA activities, such as sports or camping, but they do not want these young people to become members. It is one thing, they say, to take advantage of a social or recreational service; it is something else to support an organization in the whole range of its efforts by becoming a contributing member. The latter would create a conflict of conscience, they feel, for those who cannot accept the religious orientation of the YMCA. In some instances YMCA boards of directors have been willing to accede to this request, recognizing that in practice there is little distinction between the participant and the member. Two types of enrollment card have been made available, one requiring no signing of a statement of purpose. But in other instances the board of directors has refused to make any modification, on the ground that any sharp distinction between participants and members is a violation of basic YMCA principles. Such an issue is not resolved easily.

A REALISTIC APPROACH TO THE MEANING OF MEMBERSHIP

Many ringing declarations have been made by national bodies about the importance of being true to the genius of the YMCA as a membership organization, as contrasted with a generalized social service. In 1944 the National Council proposed to its constituent YMCAs a "Membership Platform" which called for a more responsible membership, a

more inclusive membership, a better balanced membership, and the establishment of more adequate membership records. In the report of a constituency study completed in 1943 there had been strong insistence on the importance of such a review:

A YMCA will exist and persist only so long as it reviews and re-examines the nature of its membership, recasts its philosophy as to the persons whom it should be serving and plans new approaches which will insure the maximum participation and growth of those who make up its constituency.

The membership problem, however, is still far from any workable and satisfactory solution. One may ask whether it is realistic under changed conditions to strive for a more responsible membership, based upon a fresh awareness of the present nature and task of the YMCA. Is this only a nostalgic look back to the time when the YMCA was a less complex organization with an evangelical purpose which was meaningful to most of its members? To what should one be expected to commit himself when one becomes a member of the Young Men's Christian Association? And can the answer possibly be the same for persons of all ages and religious backgrounds?

Let us register a conviction at the outset that the emphasis on the YMCA as a membership movement is fundamentally sound. The integrity and vitality of a Young Men's Christian Association depend in great measure on the existence of at least a nucleus of members who recognize what it means to belong to a Christian movement and are willing to accept seriously the responsibilities of membership. Otherwise a YMCA will become an amorphous, generalized social agency scarcely distinguishable from a private sports club or a semi-public recreational center.

For one thing, the concept of responsible membership is essential for the achievement of the YMCA's goals for persons. In earlier chapters we have stressed a combination of freedom and responsibility as the heart of what it means to

be a Christian. This has ramifications for a whole range of relationships: in family and school, at work and at play, in the community and the nation, and of course also in the church. The YMCA itself should be a laboratory for growth in social responsibility. Hence the emphasis on participation in small groups where the individual can associate with other persons of his own age with kindred interests and may learn to take his due share in planning and carrying through activities. In a day when individuals either are under pressure to conform to mass movements or are inclined to be self-centered introverts, the experience of freedom-within-community is a pearl of great price to be cherished. The YMCA should regard such training in democratic living within a Christian perspective as a central aim, never to be sidetracked by considerations of busyness or bigness.

But there are values here that go far beyond experience in small, intimate circles. We are speaking of membership not only in a group but in the YMCA. This implies the recognition of a responsible relationship to the local Association as a whole and co-operation with others in carrying out the purpose of this Association in the community and throughout the nation. Eventually it leads to a sense of belonging to a world-wide movement which transcends boundaries of race, nationality, and religious systems. Each member, within the limits of age and experience, is called upon to help determine the policies of this YMCA movement.

Furthermore, the experience of YMCA membership ought to expand one's horizon to larger social and spiritual concerns. Loyalty to an institution is not enough and may close the door to new insights. Membership in the YMCA, for one who understands what it means to be a Christian, is only a means to the end of extending God's kingdom in all human relationships. To be a YMCA member means not only to carry certain responsibilities in a local Association but to use this experience as a springboard for more effective participation as a Christian in affairs of the nation and the world.

But where then does realism come in? Such an interpretation of what it means to be a member of a YMCA seems very remote from the realities of the blurred picture of YMCA membership sketched earlier. Serious questions arise from at least three angles: (1) the age factor, (2) the "consumer" attitude, (3) the inclusion of members who are not Christians.

It is possible at any age to learn the rudiments of responsible participation in group life, including family living. Children are more capable than many adults realize of crossing boundaries of nation and race. Boys may startle their fathers by their grasp of our space age. But children cannot be expected to share in all the responsibilities implied in the National Council definition of membership quoted on an earlier page. In practice, most YMCAs limit voting membership to persons 18 years of age and over; some lower the voting age to 16. If we continue to use the term "member" for all who are enrolled in the YMCA, we must find some way to differentiate degrees of responsibility.

The executive secretary of a large metropolitan YMCA speaks for many others when he says that one of the major problems of his Association is to make members out of consumers. A large proportion of those who are counted as members in any city YMCA in the United States make an application for membership only because they desire to take advantage of certain facilities: a room, a basketball court, an evening class, a steam bath, a summer camp. Others are registered as members of a particular club or group and are scarcely conscious that they belong to the YMCA as a whole. Still others drop in for an evening's entertainment and find that it is more convenient and less expensive to fill out a membership card for a brief period. These young people or adults are members only in a nominal and technical sense. Yet in the American movement there is no generally accepted way to distinguish easily between the casual participant and the one who takes his membership seriously. It has seemed useful on the whole to designate all

these privilege users as members, both for practical reasons such as tax exemption and because this is a constituency from which individuals can be recruited for truly responsible membership. But few YMCAs are prepared to undertake the intensive work of programming and counseling that would be necessary to transform these consumers into real members.

In an earlier chapter we dealt with the dilemma facing those YMCAs which are committed to a Christian purpose and yet include in their membership Jews and other persons who make no claim to be Christians. This issue comes into sharp focus at the point of membership policy. The action of the National Council in 1963 with regard to "Christian Purpose and Practice in the YMCA Today" did not resolve the ambiguity entirely: "We welcome as members of our Associations persons of all religious affiliations who wish to join and co-operate in support of the Christian ideals and values for which we stand."

A Jew who takes his faith seriously is likely to have an inner conflict if asked to support Christian ideals and values. It will not add to his respect for the YMCA if he is told that the term "Christian" as used here is very general and has no theological implications! There are many "ideals and values" for the individual and the community which Jews and Christians can join in supporting, because these are not exclusively Christian goals. It only confuses the situation to attach a Christian label to these aims. On the other hand, there are distinctive Christian elements in the purpose of the YMCA and to put these under the table in dealing with Jews is to be unfaithful to the heritage of our movement. A slight verbal change in the wording of the recent National Council statement would maintain the position of the Christian majority in the YMCA and still imply full respect for persons of other faiths. This statement might read: "We welcome as members of our Associations persons of all religious affiliations who wish to join and cooperate in support of the ideals and values for which we stand as Christians."

These three specific ambiguities in the present YMCA situation in the United States all point to what many regard as a basic weakness of the prevailing membership policy in this country: a lack of clarity in differentiating between the many types of membership which exist in these Associations. The term "member" as used by American YMCAs today is a catch-all designation which is made to include everything from the most casual relationship based on mere payment of a fee to the most thoughtful commitment to the purposes of a world-wide Christian Association. In most other countries, and occasionally in the United States, there is a distinction between *full* (or basic) and *associate* membership. The latter category includes those who for one reason or another cannot be fully involved in determining the policies of the Association. They are not asked to subscribe to any statement of Christian purpose, but they are expected to respect the purpose of the YMCA and to co-operate in furthering its work. Persons of other faiths come under this category. Only those above a certain age, usually 16 or 18, can become full members. Only full members are eligible to membership on boards of directors, although associate members are drawn into many other responsibilities. This dual membership plan was followed for many years in the YMCAs of North America, but it is now generally regarded as unacceptable because it seems to carry a connotation of first-class and second-class membership, which might disturb the unity that goes with an open-door policy.

Efforts have been made in the United States to develop other categories that might provide for meaningful differentiation. One is to distinguish between "members-at-large" and "members-at-work," but this proposal has not gained widespread acceptance. Some Associations make a distinction between "participating" and "sustaining" members, but this does not give any clue to the depth of purpose on the part of the participant or supporter. Frequent reference is made to the inner circle or nucleus of committed members as compared with those who hold a more general and

tangential relationship, but it is exceedingly difficult to determine those who truly belong to this "nucleus."

One possible approach to clarification would be to broaden and give more meaning to the category of *voting* membership, already provided for in the constitution of many local Associations. A simple statement, quoted from a National Council guide for local YMCAs entitled "Developing Membership Policies," is suggestive:

Any person eighteen years of age or over who is a member in any Branch may become a voting member of this Association if he signifies that he is in sympathy with the purpose of the Association, indicates his willingness to co-operate actively in achieving these purposes, shares financially in forwarding the work of the Association, and assumes the responsibilities and obligations inherent in the Corporate Membership relationship.

This would seem to provide a useful basis for a genuinely responsible YMCA membership. But it would have little significance if regarded only as a formal requirement which would qualify a few members to vote at general elections once a year. Election procedures in most YMCAs are so lacking in significance that the majority of members do not care whether or not they have the right to vote.

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON MEMBERSHIP RESPONSIBILITY

We have been dealing with unresolved issues relating to what it means to be a YMCA member. Let us turn now to the rich possibilities that are at hand for deepening the experience of membership and making it an important factor in the revitalization of Christian purpose within the YMCA movement. We are looking for new perspectives in the development of members which will be appropriate to the special demands and opportunities of our day.

It is not difficult to list elements of good practice in the induction and education of members which are already widely accepted, at least in principle:

- The nature and purposes of the YMCA are explained to all who indicate a desire to become members. Usually for younger members this interpretation is part of an induction into a group and is made vivid by dramatization and symbols. With older youth and adults the interpretation is best done in personal conversation.
- A continuing effort is made to involve each member in responsibilities appropriate to his interests and capacities. Such involvement is likely to begin with the immediate club or interest group. It may lead to participation on committees related to the life of a department or of the Association as a whole.
- There are meetings of members, on special occasions, usually by age groups or departments, to launch new enterprises, to recognize achievements, to interpret the larger work of the YMCA on this continent and around the world. There is an annual meeting of the Association as a whole where policies are announced or confirmed and officers are elected.

What needs to be added to this familiar picture to set in motion the dynamics of personal growth and social change to which we have been referring in earlier chapters? One clue to the answer is to be found in more serious attention to conversations with individual members on questions of lively concern. We register again a conviction of the need for broadening and deepening the concept of counseling in every YMCA, not only in a few specialized counseling centers. The alert leader will take advantage of teachable moments in the experience of the member. In a highly organized campaign for adult members there is little time for leisurely conversation. Much counseling in the YMCA at all age levels must be on a catch-as-catch-can basis: in moments of relaxation around a cup of coffee or in a leader's home; at times when a youth has been trapped by moral failure or confusion; after a tense situation in a committee meeting when there was a clash of opinion or a disclosure of religious or racial prejudice; at the close of a period of instruction which left many questions unanswered.

This is the place to recall also what has been said about dialogue in a religiously pluralist society. YMCA members

grow in respect and understanding of other points of view and in clarification of their own faith as they experience the give-and-take that may take place in the friendly atmosphere of the YMCA. Such experiences come best when they are encouraged by a leader who has firm religious convictions of his own but knows how to stimulate fruitful conversation on deeper and delicate questions.

Another clue to a realistic development of a sense of responsibility in YMCA members lies in providing opportunities for occasional discussion of live issues in YMCA policy and practice. Often it is assumed that policy making in the YMCA should be confined to a small elected body of officers and board members. Too seldom are "ordinary" members given a chance to deal with questions of policy in terms suitable to their age and stage of development. Problems involved in the relocation of a building or its reconstruction in order to meet the changing needs of the community are sometimes discussed with the entire adult membership. Why not also introduce to youth groups and young adults the issues about racial integration with which YMCAs are faced in every part of the country? Why not share with them the question posed so often in these pages: how to keep the membership open to persons of varied social points of view and religious backgrounds and still maintain the central purpose of a Christian Association? There can be no honest-to-goodness development unless they are given the chance to weigh questions of vital concern to them and the YMCA movement.

Even with the best-devised program of membership development there will always be a considerable number of persons in the YMCA whose interests are limited and who never get drawn from the circumference of activities into the center of Christian purpose. And the YMCA that is set amid the shifting scene of the American city will always be called upon to offer services without insisting on anything but a loose affiliation. But surely such steps as those outlined above would enlarge significantly the proportion of respon-

sible members and would develop the kind of working nucleus with a firm Christian commitment which would maintain the integrity and the vitality of a Young Men's Christian Association.

RELEASING RESOURCES FOR ADVANCE WITHIN THE MEMBERSHIP

Studies of YMCA membership are sometimes confined to statistics and procedures. In this chapter we have been exploring the relation between membership meaning and movement policy. There is one more aspect to be considered: how to tap undeveloped resources within the present membership and how to expand the constituency in order to bring in new resources.

Although the YMCAs of the United States have made many adaptations in program and structure in recent decades, there is a basic conservatism in this movement which is often baffling to its most devoted and forward-looking leaders. Changes in attitude on the crucial social and religious issues of the day have come slowly. The YMCA is commonly regarded as a safe, middle-of-the-road organization. In some communities there is evidence of a responsiveness to the changing outlook of the younger generation, but all too often the YMCA seems to be controlled by older men who are very cautious about making changes. One key to change in the YMCAs of America consists in (a) releasing certain latent forces within the present membership, and (b) deliberately drawing into the membership other persons who may help to change the image of the YMCA. Let us test this thesis in several specific areas.

- *Women and girls.* There is no longer any question, at least in the United States, whether or not women and girls should be in the YMCA. They now constitute about one-fourth of the membership; four out of five YMCAs in this country report women and girls as members. But whether they are fully integrated into YMCA program and leadership is another question. It is the judgment of those who have

made a special study of this situation that "equality of opportunity and responsibility for women and girls is still an unrealized goal in the YMCAs as in society at large."² This conclusion is based partly on the fact that the proportion of women in policy-making boards and committees is much less than their representation in the membership. This inequality of opportunity is reflected also in the program. On the whole, YMCAs have tended to approach girls with the same ideas and techniques that have proved successful over the years with boys. They have failed to take seriously into account differences in sex roles and difference in values. They have often assumed that the YMCA is essentially a men's organization into which women and girls should fit as best they can.

In the few instances in the United States and Canada where men and women have merged into one Association the partnership has proved to be enriching. Women have a significant contribution to make to fulfilling the purpose of a Christian Association for individuals and in society. The concluding sentence of the study referred to above is worthy of attention by those who are convinced that the inclusion of women and girls in the YMCA should provide a wholesome ferment for change:

An important challenge to the YMCA of this half century is to further liberate the resources of women and girls, not only that they may be better served, but that their distinctive contribution to the organization and to the Christian fellowship may be more fully realized.

- *Young Adults.* A growing concern among leaders of the American movement about the declining role of young men and women in the YMCA led to a special study in this field also, which was brought to a focus in the 1963 *YMCA Year Book*.³ Here there are fresh insights into the experiences and attitudes of the early adult years, which call for special adjustments and require new responsibilities. One conclusion from this study is a recognition of the diversity within this

18-to-30 age group, which suggests different approaches to those who are single and the young married couples, to the university students and the clerks or industrial workers, to young men and young women.

In this sampling of young adults it was found that about three out of four knew nothing about the purpose and program of the YMCA. Many of them think of the Y as a young boy's organization. When they do join the YMCA it is chiefly in order to take advantage of privileges and not because of any conviction about its Christian purpose. Relatively few are involved in any leadership responsibility. Less than 2 per cent of these members between 18 and 29 served on YMCA committees and only one-tenth of 1 per cent were members of boards of directors. What a change from the earlier days of a Young Men's Christian Association!

The National Council has agreed that during the next few years there should be an intensive effort to involve young adults more fully in YMCA program and management. Special attention is to be given to identifying young men and women who are willing to carry leadership responsibility in the YMCA. Then opportunities for "take over" must be provided. This "crash" program is particularly timely in view of the fact that during the decade ahead the number of persons in the 18-to-30 age range will increase twice as fast as the average for the whole population. Here at last is a move which may help to correct the image of the Young Men's Christian Association and bring in new resources for advance — provided older leaders are willing to turn over to this younger group a larger measure of responsibility.

- *Student Associations.* There was a period in the development of the American YMCAs when Student Associations played a dynamic role and were in some respects the "spark plug" of the movement. They were in the forefront of the missionary outreach beginning late in the nineteenth century. They exercised a strong ecumenical influence within Protestantism. They supplied a ferment of critical Christian

thinking on national and international social issues, but at the same time stood for a vital Christian faith leading to personal commitment. Out of these Student YMCAs in the first few decades of this century came a steady stream of men who supplied no small part of the lay and professional leadership of city YMCAs.

The work of the YMCA and YWCA in the colleges and universities declined markedly after the churches of all denominations established their own student work, expending large sums of money in buildings and personnel. The number of Student Associations has been greatly reduced in recent years and the National Council has sponsored several studies in an effort to reappraise the role of student YMCA work under changed conditions. There are indications now of an upturn of vitality. One evidence is a keen interest in international work camps and student exchange, as well as the recruiting and financing of an increasing number of student World Service workers overseas. Another evidence is the vigorous approach on some university campuses to the whole question of the meaning of Christian commitment, encouraging an open search for religious meaning but presenting at the same time the relevance of the Christian faith to the issues of our day.

The present trend is toward achieving a better integration of student work within the YMCA movement as a whole. Thus far attention has been concentrated on organizational integration: co-operation in financing, sharing of personnel, better representation of student leaders on local and area committees, and similar moves. But from the standpoint of membership resources it is far more important to see how the special insights and concerns of student members can be taken more fully into account by the YMCA movement as a whole. The tendency of local boards and State or Area Councils, dominated by older men, is to curb and control the actions of Student YMCAs rather than to encourage a forthright expression of Christian conviction. A forward-looking strategy for the YMCA movement in the United

States would be to extend the participation of students in policy-making bodies, local and national.

Y's Men's Clubs. When the International Association of Y's Men's Clubs celebrated its 40th birthday in 1962, there were 668 clubs in 39 countries with a total of about 17,000 members. Almost 70 per cent of these Y's Men's Clubs are in the United States and Canada. Most interpretations of this movement stress the fact that here is a service club of the YMCA, providing a great deal of leadership to local Associations and giving invaluable assistance in financial campaigns and membership drives. What needs to be stressed more often is the noteworthy expression of an international outlook and the occasional pioneering ventures of these clubs in cutting across racial and religious lines. Here too is a potential medium of education with regard to the role of Christian laymen in daily life and work, since these clubs represent a cross section of occupations in the community.

This body of younger adults, attracting particularly men between 25 and 45 years of age, deserves special mention among the resources for advance within the present YMCA membership.

- *Young Men in Industry.* At the time of the 1963 meeting of the National Council of Industrial Management Clubs there were 228 member clubs in 24 states reporting a total membership of over 32,000. Although the focus of attention is on problems of human relationships at the management level, these clubs also sponsor an educational program on economic and industrial questions for younger YMCA members. This organization of younger men in industry is providing a natural channel for fellowship and co-operation between Protestants and Roman Catholics. A concern for world-wide economic problems is becoming evident through international seminars of top management personnel held in Germany and South America.

The YMCA has never been notably successful, however,
 175 in attracting young industrial engineers and technicians or

young men in labor unions. Industrial workers who are not in positions of management seldom get elected to a YMCA board of directors. One older secretary of wide experience writes: "Here is a frontier from which the YMCA retreated forty years ago. If we did as diligent work among labor leaders as we have done among leaders of management, we would find the breakthrough." Here is another way in which the American YMCA movement can find realistic expression in an industrialized society.

- *Negroes.* Close to 10 per cent of the members of the YMCAs of the United States are of the Negro race. In our concentration on the problems faced in accepting these members into full rights and privileges we are prone to overlook the potential contribution that they can make to the Association movement. The very fact of their experience in a minority status qualifies many Negroes to make an exceedingly valuable contribution to the life and work of American YMCAs at points where there is urgent need: developing a keen sense of the social implications of the Christian faith, the deepening of spiritual experience through suffering, a sensitivity to interpersonal relationships. Studies of boards of directors and committees of management show that Negro members add something significant to policy making.

Here, then, are several illustrations of the resources within the present membership which might be utilized more fully for introducing creative and constructive elements into the YMCAs of the United States. At present the points of view of younger men and women and of minority groups carry far too little weight in the decisions that are made about YMCA policy and program. If we are really determined to transform YMCAs to the point where they will provide a more vigorous expression of lay Christian concern for the great social and religious issues of the day, respected not only for recreational activities but also for serious study of national and international problems, we shall take a fresh

look at these resources within the membership waiting to be tapped. We might then ponder also, as a basic consideration of membership policy, how to attract more persons into the membership who have a deep concern as Christians for a vital faith related to the major issues of our times, but have not realized that the YMCA is a useful ecumenical, interracial, and international channel through which these concerns can find expression.

Notes for Chapter 8

¹ YWCAs continue to serve children under 12, however, and they often include men and boys in their activities. More details will be found in a pamphlet, *Membership Policies and Practices in Community YWCAs* (National Board of the YWCA, 600 Lexington Ave., New York, N. Y., 1962).

² 1962 YMCA Year Book, p. 24.

³ See also printed report: Allen S. Ellsworth, *Young Men and Young Women*, National Council of YMCAs, 1963.

9

New Perspectives on Educating for Character

Neither buildings, nor operational procedures, nor financial management, nor programs, nor committee action will have lasting meaning unless the central characteristic is fundamentally that of developing Christian character. Failure in this cannot be hidden from the public, government, leadership or members. The YMCA can grow strong in any community as it makes the Christian emphasis a powerful and discernible thread which runs through all of its activities. Where the Christian dimension is a quiet and dignified, but powerful and all-pervasive characteristic of the YMCA—there the YMCA will be strong.¹

We are told on every hand that we are facing a crisis in morals. From daily press and popular magazines comes a stream of articles dealing with the more obvious forms of juvenile delinquency and adult lawlessness, teen-age promiscuity and marital infidelity. Occasionally these analyses go deeper to point to a disturbing rise in financial dishonesty, racial animosity, and international intrigue. Privileged home owners in the suburbs worry as much about the moral deviations of youth as do those who dwell in city slums.

This alleged breakdown of morals seems somewhat exaggerated to those who are familiar with the more seamy side of life in earlier generations. Many of the same conditions have existed for centuries behind the scenes. Yet there can be little question that ethical standards once widely accepted are losing their force and that both young and old are departing more openly from the conventions of polite society. It may be that what we are witnessing is not a decline in morality as compared with former times so much as a failure to make the advance in moral insight which our times demand. "Time makes ancient good uncouth."

Here is one more indication of what happens in a world "come of age." External disciplines are weakened; individuals are on their own, forced to make choices on the basis of personal conviction. The humanist says that we are groping for a new moral code. But from the standpoint of Christian faith what we need is not a new code of morals

but a deeper apprehension and demonstration of a way of life already set forth in the gospel of Jesus Christ, applied to the rapidly changing social conditions of our day.

Under these circumstances a concern for character education comes to the fore with fresh urgency. Where do our processes of educating for moral integrity break down? The YMCA has made rather bold claims to be a character-building agency. If this is to be more than window dressing in seeking financial support we must take another look at the effectiveness of the YMCA's impact on the attitudes and behavior of growing youth. The moral crisis of our times presents another frontier situation in which the mission and method of the Young Men's Christian Association need to be re-examined with all the realism we can muster. We shall look first at the findings of the behavioral sciences about the role of a voluntary youth-serving organization in the formation of character, then consider the special resources at the disposal of a Christian Association. Later we shall undertake to trace the implications of these principles for certain specific types of YMCA program.

THE GENERAL ROLE OF THE YMCA IN CHARACTER EDUCATION

Research in character education is beset by many difficulties. It is not easy to get agreement on the patterns of character which are desirable in a particular society, nor to construct a "design for values" which is more than a series of abstractions. It is hard to identify with assurance cause-and-effect relationships in a realm where there are so many variables. The studies by Hartshorne and May thirty years ago raised questions about the consistency with which any traits of character are likely to be transferred from one specific situation to another. Nevertheless, there is a slowly emerging body of conclusions which represent a fairly widespread consensus among specialists in this field. In a series of long-term studies carried on under the guidance of Dr. Robert Havighurst of the University of Chicago we have

the best findings to date about the forces that seem to influence character development:

Character appears to be shaped predominantly by the intimate, emotionally powerful relationship between child and parents, within the family. Forces outside the family are not negligible nor irrelevant in their indirect effect on character formation, but it looks as though these forces operate mainly as they shape and guide parents' behavior. . . .

Parents cannot reasonably expect to turn over very much of the character training of their children to other people, whether in school, church, or youth organizations. By the very nature of character formation, no one other than parents can ordinarily have one-tenth of their influence.²

Clearly, the basic qualities of personality structure are determined by the child's experiences with his parents. Other persons and events can affect character development, exercising a curative or a destructive influence. But seldom are these later influences exerted intensively enough, in the typical American community, to make noteworthy changes. Such conclusions reinforce a point made earlier in this book that the YMCA is in partnership with the churches, the schools, and other agencies in support of the best efforts of the home. These findings suggest that any statesmanlike program of character building calls for community-wide collaboration of all the forces at work with children and youth. They underline the importance of close contact with parents and indicate that those YMCAs are on the right track which give serious attention to parent education as part of a program which seeks to draw the entire family into the orbit of YMCA influence.³

But these research findings also point to the opportunities available to organizations like the YMCA which give special stress to working with children and adolescents in smaller, closely knit groups. It is the peer group which appears to provide the greatest opportunity outside the family to reinforce moral values and test the consequences of particular forms of behavior. Young people are ordinarily more responsive to criticisms and suggestions from

persons of their own age than from adults. Examples could be cited of the success of student councils in high school and college in supporting high standards of conduct. Occasionally teen-age juries have been of assistance to juvenile court judges in making decisions about young people brought before them for traffic violations or more serious offenses.

There is a clue in these research findings also to the role of the adult adviser—parent, pastor, youth leader—and to the type of adult guidance which is likely to be most effective:

The only method that works in favor of mature, dependable character is first to give people—whether children or adults—reason to feel an incentive to behave ethically; and then to guide them intelligently, patiently, and with growing freedom to make and test their own decisions. This way works; none of the other methods of child rearing, or reformation, breeds more than unthinking, rigid compliance at best—and many methods breed savagely hostile revenge behavior.⁴

CHRISTIAN INSIGHTS REGARDING GOAL AND METHOD

What has been said thus far would apply to any voluntary organization at work with children, youth, or young men and women, whether or not it had a religious orientation. We turn now to the more delicate question of how the Christian purpose and heritage of the YMCA may be brought to bear on the development of character. At this point we must keep in mind all that has been said in earlier chapters about the pluralistic setting in which YMCAs work in the United States.

Even though the proportion of YMCA members not affiliated in some way with a Christian church is very small, there are reasons for restraint in speaking of *Christian* education when interpreting to the average person the role of the YMCA. This is partly because of the denominational and confessional differences among Christians, a point to which

we shall return later in this chapter. But caution is called for also because many young people and young adults join the YMCA without any conscious desire for moral and religious training. It is one thing for leaders to have a clear awareness of the Christian purpose of the YMCA; it is a quite different matter when dealing with younger persons whose first approach to the YMCA is governed by an interest in sports or a desire simply to be with friends in a club. To put up a sign, "Join the YMCA and improve your character," would scarcely be the way to attract lively young people! In a very real sense, the YMCA *is* a center for Christian education, but this deeper understanding of its mission comes only with experience and is not something to be put forward as a slogan.

Without going into the nature of ethics from a philosophical standpoint, one can assume general agreement among Americans about the existence of a structure of morality which can provide the basis for character education regardless of religious affiliation. For Jew and Christian alike the moral law is to be interpreted as God's law. According to the Declaration of Independence all men are endowed *by their Creator* with certain inalienable rights. The Judeo-Christian tradition has had so strong an influence in the development of Western society that at most points Christians can join with persons of other faiths and none in upholding a common morality. To this end it is appropriate that a Christian Association should sponsor a program of character education which includes persons of different religious backgrounds.

But there are special insights and resources in the Christian faith which leaders of the YMCA should be prepared to draw upon as they seek to influence character development. These relate to the ends which we seek in working with persons, to our awareness of the limitations of our endeavor, and to our enduring hope regarding the outcome.

We have dealt earlier—in Chapter 3—with the call of the Christian to freedom and responsibility. In this context the

focus of attention for the "trainee" is shifted away from himself and his growth to the whole nexus of relationships in which he is caught up. His highest good is then seen in terms of helping to establish those attitudes and relationships among persons which are in accord with the purposes of God as made clear particularly in Jesus of Nazareth. This is the Kingdom to be sought above everything else. Sometimes the quest is thought of as a great cause; more often it is conceived in quite specific and limited terms related to one's immediate family and community.

When one responds to meeting some of the concrete and crying needs with which all of us are surrounded, one is assured that all other things will be added, including growth in character. Over and over again in the New Testament is an emphasis on gaining one's life by losing it. This is part of the insight of the old adage, "Character is caught rather than taught." Christian character is caught along the way in the process of committing oneself as a disciple to the one whom Bonhoeffer called "the Man-for-others."

For the person himself character development is a by-product of worthy, self-forgetting endeavor. But for the adult leader-guide the focus of attention is only in part on the enterprise or activity. He is concerned above all with what is happening to persons. In a sense the by-product is more important to the leader than the main performance on which the attention of others is concentrated. It takes discipline for a leader not to be so engrossed in the winning of a game that he neglects to observe what is happening to the players. He tends to be so busy noting audience reactions to a drama that he fails to see what the experience means to the actors.

But the Christian leader will not be satisfied with observing changes in persons which are fairly obvious, such as advance in physical co-ordination and greater ease in social adjustment. His deeper concern will be with those elements of behavior which reflect inner confidence versus anxiety, genuine respect for others versus a tendency to dominate

or manipulate, increasing sensitivity to current social issues versus an acceptance of the status quo. He will be alert to note the extent to which the religious beliefs of the individual are related to his daily attitudes and actions, for if he is to deal with the whole person he cannot lay "religious" questions aside and refer them to the parent or pastor. As a representative of a Christian Association it is his deepest desire that an individual's faith in God shall come to have meaning for every aspect of personal living and the whole range of interpersonal relationships.

The Christian leader or adviser must be quite aware, however, of limitations in his effort to guide the development of character. The Christian view of man is utterly realistic: there is an innate streak of self-centeredness which must be taken into account in all human behavior. Actions are never pure gold; there is always the alloy resulting from a measure of self-interest. These limitations are due also to inherited social structures and deeply entrenched cultural patterns. This realistic understanding of the human and social predicament will save a leader from the frustration and disappointment that result from a utopian outlook on character education.

The realism of Christian faith serves also to make a leader sensitive to his own limitations as a counselor. It is exceedingly difficult for an adviser to share his own convictions on matters of conduct and yet retain a desirable objectivity in counseling. There is an art to knowing how to deal firmly with moral failure without creating resentment or discouragement. This dilemma of the Christian educator is described aptly in the following excerpt from a symposium on Christian faith and the educational process:

The minute I think I measure up, I have become a Pharisee. The moment I become too concerned about my own righteousness or that of another, I question the doctrine of God's grace. . . . [The goal] is to be released from the necessity to measure up to external standards and to accept one's self as he is, his finitude, his creatureliness, and the fact of God's forgiveness.⁵

The reference in the closing words of this quotation to God's forgiveness reminds us of another insight which is central in the Christian faith. In spite of all the limitations of which a Christian leader-counselor is aware, he never gives up hope. Some of us refrain from talking about "building" Christian personality because of the implication that man is the chief architect in the formation of character. We are only fellow workmen with God. His design for persons and society is greater than our most advanced blueprints, and the resources at his disposal are beyond our highest expectations. The power of human love to bring about changes in attitudes and behavior is incalculable. How much greater, then, is the unbounded love of God, expressed through those whom he has entrusted with a ministry of reconciliation. Here is a perspective that dwarfs every moralistic approach and at the same time impels the Christian leader to keep trying in the midst of moral confusion and social disorder.

SPECIAL RESOURCES FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATORS

One of the chief resources for character education when seen in Christian perspective is the Bible. Stories from the Old and New Testament often convey a point far better than abstract discussion. The effective telling of Bible stories in the YMCA camp or club meeting is becoming, we fear, a lost art. Yet these stories, if allowed to speak for themselves and not spoiled by moralizing, have proved effective and need not raise controversial questions of interpretation. Professor Markus Barth, in an article bearing the novel title "The Cowboy in the Sunday School," declares that the stories of the Bible are far more true to life than the romantic Westerns which supply so much of the television fare for children today.

The story is always, with children of all ages, a hundred times clearer and more communicative than an abstract statement—even if the latter contains all desirable relevance and clarity. . . . A teacher who doubts the power of the word and who yearns

for movies and other palpable aids has not yet gotten the faintest idea of the purpose, contents, intention and power of Bible stories.

The biblical stories are never merely the same old stuff all over again. If a fairy tale or a Western works by the element of tension and surprise, why forbid children in Sunday School [or YMCA] to be taken aback, bewildered, excited, shocked, or noisily overjoyed with the tension, clash and outcome of biblical stories?

To prepare the telling of a Bible story and to tell it is not to make something of the story or to do something tricky or shrewd about it. It is rather to let the story speak for itself. The teacher need not identify Nebuchadnezzar with Stalin or Hitler, or Lazarus with the poor neighbor next door. The children make much better, faster, and more valid identifications. The so-called moral summary, the "purpose" with which we desired to add our blessing or to rub in a story's gist and usefulness, was actually nothing other than the murder of the story.⁶

What we are suggesting here is not to put the YMCA into competition with the churches in study of the Bible. There are few situations in the United States where the YMCA is called upon to provide a systematic program of biblical instruction. But a leader who knows the Bible as an exciting record of God's dealing with men will find this an indispensable resource for relating the Christian faith to the real issues which young people are facing today. Unfortunately, the approach to the Bible in most courses available to YMCA secretaries and volunteer leaders, even in theological seminaries, does not usually give the deeper understanding of the "unfolding drama" of the Old and New Testaments which is essential for the storyteller. But perhaps it is not too late to recover a skill in the use of the Bible with youth for which the YMCA a few decades ago was well known.

Another point at which the Christian nature of the YMCA finds explicit expression is in moments of prayer with a group, or the more extended periods of devotion in the YMCA camp or conference. Such periods under skillful leadership may be of incalculable value for insight and decision on matters affecting deeply the conduct and attitudes of individuals. Some social scientists recognize that

education for character is more than a rational examination of the moral consequences of one's action. In the study by Peck and Havighurst mentioned earlier there is a brief statement about the essential value of "nonrational symbols" that affect the emotions and represent the intertwining of ethics and religion. These writers point to "the serious dangers inherent in an arid intellectualism which is sterilized of affective experience" and pay their respect to the kind of experiences "which provide expression and fulfillment for these non-rational aspects of our natures."⁷ Translated into simpler language, here is a recognition of the power of prayer and religious symbolism in affecting the inner springs of human conduct. It is one of the distinctive contributions of a Christian Association to relate the "I-Thou" experience of prayer to the person-to-person relationships of daily life.

We have made relatively few references in this book to more direct and explicit forms of Christian education. When we recognize the involvement of a lay Christian Association in the world, it is normal that the Christian basis of the YMCA should be manifested in all aspects of program and policy rather than in a special department designated "religious." Yet we have maintained also that there are occasions when the Christian basis and orientation of the YMCA should be made unequivocally clear. The question is not whether there should be Bible study and prayer in the YMCA, but how these special media of expression can be brought to bear effectively in counseling, group work, and other programs. It is not the form of Bible study and prayer which is of greatest concern for the YMCA leader, but the content of these explicitly religious elements and their relevance to the real questions faced by growing persons today.

AN ECUMENICAL APPROACH TO CHRISTIAN CHARACTER EDUCATION

Should prayer, Bible study, and direct reference to Christian moral standards be incorporated in the YMCA program where there is a mixed religious constituency including

Jews, Roman Catholics, and perhaps a few Orthodox? We have dealt with this question in principle in Chapters 5 and 6. Our answer in effect has been: Yes, it is both possible and desirable on certain occasions to give clear expression to the Christian basis and purpose of the YMCA, provided that this is done in ways which treat the varying religious traditions with respect without compromising the central Christian conviction about God's decisive historical revelation in Jesus Christ.

So far as Jewish members of the YMCA are concerned, liberal use may be made of stories from the Old Testament and prayers from the Jewish tradition, but there should be no hesitation about introducing also elements from the New Testament. There must not be any easygoing assumption, however, that Jews can accept these Christian elements as part of *their* faith. Dr. Visser 't Hooft in the recent book previously quoted refers to our obligation to share the gospel with "the Jews with whom the Christians have so much in common and to whom they owe so much"⁸ without assuming that Judaism and Christianity are one and the same faith.

When it comes to Roman Catholic and Orthodox members, leaders of any particular YMCA must make up their minds whether they want their Association to be identified frankly with Protestantism or whether they are prepared to try to make the YMCA an association in which Christians of all confessions can take part on a basis of equality without conflict of conscience. Those who take the former position will continue to be predominantly Protestant in orientation and leadership. They will not be troubled about holding YMCA meetings in Protestant churches. They will give no special thought to adapting devotional services so that Catholics can find them congenial to the teachings of their Church. Whether these leaders realize it or not, they will be treating Roman Catholic members as "guests" who are welcome to participate in YMCA activities without becoming an integral part of its life and work.

But if those who determine the policies of a local Association seek to maintain the YMCA as a Christian but not a confessional organization they will take steps to modify the practice of their YMCA in such ways as the following:

- When a Hi-Y Club or some similar group gathers for a devotional period, the content of the program will express common aspirations in prayer and praise. Gatherings such as Hi-Y inductions will not be held in a church setting.
- If there is a series of talks or lectures on moral and spiritual topics, every effort will be made to secure speakers who represent the several Christian confessions, with due care to avoid doctrinal controversy.
- If there is systematic Bible study, provision will be made for Roman Catholic or Orthodox members to engage in such study under a leader acceptable to the authorities of their respective churches.
- If the library or reading room of the YMCA is to contain materials dealing with Christian life and faith — and this is much to be desired — care will be taken to select periodicals and books which represent with fairness the points of view of the various churches, or which deal with topics of common Christian concern.
- If there is to be observance of the great Christian festivals or of the World YMCA/YWCA Week of Prayer, these will be planned as an occasion for genuine Christian fellowship and inspiration in which members of all Christian confessions can join. If a service of a liturgical nature is used, prayers from the liturgies of the several confessions will be included. If members of the clergy are invited to give leadership on such occasions, Roman Catholic and Orthodox priests will sometimes be asked to speak or lead in prayer. Reference to such occasions in the YMCA as “worship” may be misunderstood, since this term connotes for the Roman Catholic a more formal service such as the Mass, which can be held only under Church auspices.

PROBLEMS AND OPPORTUNITIES IN SPECIFIC PROGRAM AREAS

It will add realism to our review of new perspectives in character education if we test out the principles that have guided our discussion thus far in certain specific areas of YMCA program. We shall confine attention to three areas which offer special opportunities and problems. The Hi-Y Club movement, which would serve as another significant example, is not included at this point, since there have been a number of references to this program in earlier chapters.

1. *YMCA Camping.* Organized camping has as great possibilities for guiding the growth of children and youth in character development as any YMCA program. The camp is an informal and attractive setting away from familiar surroundings, where children have an experience of intimate group living under around-the-clock guidance of counselors who are usually carefully chosen for their character as well as their skills. It is recognized, of course, that any YMCA camp is obligated to measure up to the standards of good camping in general. "What shall it profit a camp to be 'Christian' but not safe and healthy?" But special attention is to be given to the "plus" elements which should be characteristic of a camp which seeks to educate for character on a Christian basis. The following principles are drawn largely from the findings of a National Consultation on YMCA Camping held in 1957:

- A Christian emphasis in character education is not something added to an already overcrowded program, but is inherent in every situation, experience, and activity in the camp.
- The focus of attention of the leader must be on what the individual is to be as the result of his camp experience rather than on what he will do in camp.
- Growth in maturity in social attitudes and interpersonal relationships is a major goal. This should include wherever possible experience in group living with persons of other racial and cultural backgrounds.

- Activities of a specifically religious nature are to be introduced into the camp program naturally and as an integral part of the camping experience.
- The concern for Christian values must be reflected in the selection and training of leaders. Staff members should be free from religious or racial bias and have a mature grasp of the Christian objectives of the camp.

When it comes, however, to a concrete application of these principles in varying situations around the country, some issues come up sharply on which it proves very difficult to get agreement. One of these issues is interracial camping. The inclusion of Negro boys is now accepted practice in YMCA camps in many areas, but elsewhere it is still in the experimental stage or ruled out as unthinkable for the present.

YMCA camp leaders in New England have given serious consideration to the challenge of religious pluralism. Shall YMCA camps be completely "nonsectarian," operating on the principle that the YMCA is obligated to serve the entire community? Should the endeavor be to help each boy grow more mature in his own religious tradition, whatever that may be, and avoid anything that might disturb the harmony of the camp? Or, if the YMCA is to fulfill its Christian purpose, shall the camp directors be Christian without apology, selective in their enrollment and choice of leaders, and committed to a specific Christian emphasis in the program? This issue is particularly acute in a section of the country where on the average one-fourth of the campers last year were Roman Catholic and another fourth Jewish.

Without delving in detail into the pros and cons of this complex problem, we venture to suggest a few guiding principles for YMCA camp leaders in a pluralistic situation of this kind:

- The Christian orientation of the camp should be clearly stated in public interpretations and interviews with parents, but it should be made clear at the same time that a certain

proportion of Jewish campers are welcomed and that their religious tradition will be respected. This will call for special provision for Jewish campers in the more formal aspects of worship and it may call for slight modifications in diet upon request.

- It should be made clear also that the orientation of the camp is *inclusively* Christian and that the traditions of all denominations and confessions will be respected. Again, for Roman Catholics this will require provision for attendance at Mass at least once a week and attention to diet for those who follow certain disciplines regarding food.

- The presence of campers of different religious backgrounds puts a special responsibility on counselors who guide the more informal expressions of religious devotion, such as prayer at meals and cabin devotions. In the intimate experience of cabin life there will be a rare opportunity to encourage each camper to express his own deepest aspirations and to grow in his spiritual life. Here is the place also where he may learn to understand and appreciate the varying religious backgrounds of his cabin mates.

- There will normally be a weekly chapel service, perhaps daily morning prayers or evening vespers, in which all campers are expected to take part. Here the content will be drawn from the rich resources of our Judeo-Christian heritage, with some liturgical elements from the several great traditions. The camp-wide Sunday service or vespers provides a good setting for the vivid telling of Bible stories referred to earlier.

- If these specifically religious occasions are taken seriously by camp directors, special care will be exercised in the selection of leaders for this phase of the program. In the American setting most of these leaders will be from Protestant churches; therefore it is highly important that one or more Roman Catholic laymen should share in the planning, aided no doubt by the counsel of a priest who is sympathetic to the YMCA's ecumenical efforts. If there is a large Jewish constituency in the camp, one of the staff members should

be a Jew well versed in his own religious and cultural tradition. Many will share the view of the New England camp director who reacted against the temptation to get by with unqualified religious leadership: "What gets me is that we dutifully take our Roman Catholic campers to a church where an ordained and trained clergyman is in charge of the worship, but we let our Protestant campers worship under the leadership of a good-hearted college sophomore who knows little about religion in general or Christianity in particular." On the other hand, there are Protestant laymen who are well qualified to give leadership on such occasions.

A new perspective on the YMCA's approach in pluralist America is illustrated by a letter sent out to prospective counselors by the chairman of a Camp Committee in the Middle West, dealing with the question, "What place has religion in the counseling program at Camp ——?" The writer points out that the policy of this camp has been not to overstress the Protestant point of view. "The 'religious' emphasis centered in developing attitudes and ethical concepts common to all men of good will regardless of their specific religious convictions—such as fair play, the brotherhood of all men, 'live and let live,' and so on. . . . We were interested in 'togetherness,' tolerance, a morality basic to our Judeo-Christian culture." But now, says this lay leader, "We are in a new era. We are truly a pluralistic society. Social and religious groups who were minorities in the early twenties are now full-fledged partners in our society." Then he asks counselors for the 1963 season to consider certain questions, among them these:

Have we reached a point in our relationships where we should encourage campers of various faiths to discuss religion frankly with each other, not to accentuate our differences, but to develop a climate where differences can be stated with a knowledge that they will be received with understanding and compassion?

Will a more positive relationship result between campers if we make a sincere attempt to understand the contributions each of us can make to the commonweal as members of different religious traditions?

2. *Health and Physical Education.* There is evidence from various studies that more than one-half of all who join the YMCA are attracted in the first instance by sports and physical activities. If the character-building aims of the YMCA are to become effective, it is clear that special attention must be given to health and physical education, which over the years in most countries has loomed so large in the program of YMCAs. Church leaders who are interested in religious education have seldom explored deeply the opportunities for developing Christian character through sports and physical education. Here then is a field where the YMCA can make a distinctive contribution. This is a subject worthy of extended treatment, but in this setting of new perspectives our review must be limited to a few paragraphs.

One point to be stressed is the Christian insight into *the body and its development*. Physical and emotional well-being is an essential ingredient in the development of character. The Hebrew and Christian views of the body as expressed in the Old and New Testaments are not basically ascetic; the body is part of God's creation to be used joyfully, but under discipline. In these days of ulcers, nervous breakdowns, and alcoholism there is an obvious relationship between the care of the body and Christian character development. The YMCA's stress on physical fitness is not primarily for the purpose of personal satisfaction, winning athletic contests, or maintaining a strong military force, but for the sake of fitness in the service of God and fellow man. The discipline to be undergone in physical education is in order to develop the body to its fullest potentiality, not torturing or despising it, but respecting it as "a temple of the Holy Spirit." A Christian view of man includes a wholesome regard for health and physical education.

Sports and physical activities may contribute in important ways to the *development of Christian social attitudes and practices*. To establish and maintain high standards of fair play and sportsmanship is a practical application of Christian teaching about honesty and respect for neighbor. Boys

and young men who come to the YMCA to develop themselves physically may be led to become more sensitive to the health and welfare needs of others. Through their experience in the YMCA they may become aware of deficiencies in provisions which are made for recreation and physical education in their own community and in other countries. Moreover, those who engage in sports are among the first to run up against racial discrimination. Why should not Negro youth be permitted to use the same swimming pool and to take part on an equal plane in athletic contests? Or, again, how can international athletic contests promote understanding of other peoples? Also, there is no part of the YMCA program more likely than sports and physical education to promote congenial contacts between persons of different confessions and faiths.

All this points to the importance of the *coach or physical director as a Christian counselor*. One who has skill in sports is in a position to gain the confidence and respect of youth. He is likely to have more frequent and intimate contact with persons than any other YMCA leader. His counseling may begin with matters of health and physical advice, but it can go on to the deepest problems of the individual. He has a golden opportunity to develop Christian ethical standards, to show the relation between the letter and the spirit of the law, to develop respect for the rights and needs of others. If he shows in his own life a genuine devotion to Christian values and is himself an active participant in a church, his influence on the religious attitudes of young people may be very great.

These considerations, and many more that could be advanced, illustrate the importance of relating health and physical education to the central Christian purpose of the YMCA. Here is one of the prime places where the ethical and spiritual objectives of the YMCA can be brought out of the clouds of general principle into the realm of practical endeavor.⁹

3. *Young Adults*. Enough was said in the last chapter about **198**

the results of a recent study of young adults to indicate the crucial importance of this aspect of YMCA program from the standpoint of new perspectives on educating for Christian character. "Of all periods of life," declares an outstanding scholar in the field of human growth and development, "early adulthood is the fullest of teachable moments and the emptiest of efforts to teach. It is a time of special sensitivity and unusual readiness of the person to learn."¹⁰ Dr. Havighurst lists eight major "developmental life tasks" of these early adult years: selecting a mate, learning to live with a marriage partner, starting a family, rearing children, managing a home, getting started in an occupation, taking on civic responsibility, finding a congenial social group.

In recent years the YMCAs of the United States have not been notably successful in reaching and holding young men and women of this age. This is not the place to outline a program for advance, especially since such a forward move is now being given high priority by the National Council. Several convictions may be registered, however:

- It is not enough to conceive of the task of the YMCA with this group as primarily recreational. Many individuals will be caught up in a program of sports and recreation, and to the extent that the potentialities of the YMCA as outlined in the pages immediately preceding are realized there will be a chance for lasting influence on personal growth and development. But the YMCA needs to revamp its "image" so that young adults will think of it as a center for serious study of the crucial issues which face them in these transition years. Perhaps "study" is not the right word, if this implies academic lectures only. But the YMCA has a wealth of experience in informal education which should be brought to bear intensively on the questions which young men and women themselves are raising. Dropping into the YMCA to relax with friends does not go far enough. These casual contacts must somehow become the prelude to "short-term program ventures" in such areas as vocational discovery,

engagement and marriage, and current political and racial issues.

- Not much is likely to happen in these directions unless young men and women come to think of the YMCA as *their* Association in a sense that seldom exists now. It is reported that many of these young people regard the YMCA as a place for boys and an organization controlled by older men. Too seldom do they feel at home in the YMCA; not often enough are they taken into counsel on basic questions of structure and administration which every YMCA is facing.

- There is special need to discover at least a small proportion of these young men and women who are seriously concerned to wrestle with questions of religious faith. For most of them "religion" is identified with conventional religious symbols and practices. Yet there is evidence that a significant number of young adults — not only on the university campus but in business and professional life — are restlessly seeking a satisfying faith that makes sense amid the realities of a world come of age. Because of its lay, interconfessional character the YMCA ought to provide a place for honest searching under the most competent leadership available.

- We have scarcely begun to explore a wider use of the arts in the YMCA with young men and women. This would include opportunities for listening to good music and discussing current films, plays, and books, which often convey a message on the issues of life more effectively than lectures and sermons. It would include also the creative arts: drama groups, film-making clubs, perhaps the modern dance. Here and there, but all too rarely, YMCAs of the United States are using audio-visual aids with imagination. Sometimes these have become effective aids to worship. If YMCAs were to welcome the initiative of young adults in this field of the arts and to encourage expression of social and religious themes through the arts, a minor revolution might take place in the present somewhat drab and conventional program.

Notes for Chapter 9

¹ Robert King Hall, *Study of YMCA World Service Policies and Practices* (private document printed by the International Committee of YMCAs for its own use), p. 192.

² Robert F. Peck and Robert J. Havighurst, *The Psychology of Character Development* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1960), pp. 175, 190. By permission of John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

³ YMCAs here and there are engaging in experimental programs in this field. A few Associations are co-operating in the Character Education Project directed by Prof. Ernest Ligon, which calls for the close collaboration of parents in developing specific character traits. A number of YMCAs in Southern states are joining with the public schools in a project of moral education or youth guidance whereby competent specialists lead discussions with high school youth on sex, drinking, honesty, and similar problems. The YMCA of San Francisco has conducted an intensive program with high school youth relating to education in values. Such programs deserve more careful appraisal than can be given here.

⁴ *The Psychology of Character Development*, op. cit., p. 192. By permission of John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

⁵ Quoted from *Evaluation and Christian Education*. Published by the National Council of Churches. Copyright 1959. Used with permission.

⁶ Markus Barth, *Religious Education*, Jan-Feb. and March-April, 1962.

⁷ *The Psychology of Character Development*, op. cit., p. 202.

⁸ W. A. Visser 't Hooft, *No Other Name* (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1963), p. 116.

⁹ See also *Report of the Fifth World Consultation on Health and Physical Education*, Rome, 1960, World Alliance of YMCAs.

¹⁰ Robert J. Havighurst, *Human Development and Education* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1953).

10

Developing Leaders to

Match the Times

Sooner or later in every discussion of crucial problems confronting the YMCA—or any other organization—someone will arise and say, “It all boils down to a question of leadership.” In this time of testing for the YMCA there is in truth a crisis of leadership. But all too often this is regarded primarily as a matter of numbers. Officers of the YMCAs of the United States report that at any moment there are several hundred unfilled vacancies in secretarial positions in this country. There is an intensified nation-wide recruiting effort

designed to draw more qualified young men into the secretaryship. But even if this were to succeed beyond expectations it would not be the final answer to the problem, for there is another explanation of the shortage of leaders, both lay and professional, which cuts deeper than statistics or promotion: "The work and planning of the YMCA may be too institutional, too bound by tradition, not sufficiently dynamic and revolutionary to attract and inspire leaders to a devoted and creative service."¹

This concern haunts us as we conclude this reappraisal of the role of the YMCA in America today. Where can we get the working force — both volunteer and professional — equipped to lead this movement in the directions that seem to be called for? Are there persons now related to the YMCAs of the United States who would gladly respond more positively to the social and theological challenges of our times, if they were certain that they would have a chance to exercise leadership effectively? Some present leaders are being frustrated by the power structure of the YMCA and the community which seems to make it so difficult to bring about changes. What can be done to reassure the disturbed but creative spirits within the YMCAs of America who are the potential leaders of tomorrow?

It is obvious that in one chapter we cannot do justice to the host of questions relating to the discovery and development of leaders for our Christian Associations today. There are a number of clues in preceding chapters to the drawing out of leadership qualities in young people as part of the process of effective group work and counseling. In a sense, whenever a person — young or old — commits himself more fully to the service of God and fellow men, he is on the way toward leadership; for to be a leader in the New Testament sense is nothing less than accepting a call to service. Every Junior Leaders' Corps in the YMCA, every significant committee, every experience in project planning, is potentially part of the day-by-day process of evoking leadership to be put to use in the YMCA and the community.

But at this point our attention is focused on "top" leadership; that is, on the relatively small number of persons in a YMCA who serve as the nucleus of the Association and really determine its policies. This is not a denial of the democratic processes which exist to some extent in all YMCAs, nor is it meant to confine our thinking to the board of directors and the staff of an Association. But in all realism we must admit that relatively few persons functioning at strategic points make the basic decisions about a particular YMCA, or for the national movement, no matter how many hundreds of people may be involved at lower echelons of leadership responsibility.

A CALL TO NEW PERSPECTIVES

It is time to review in orderly fashion the new perspectives for a lay Christian movement that have emerged from our study. This list may serve as a rough summary, although not necessarily chapter by chapter nor in the same sequence.

- *The Christian Faith Versus Religion-in-General.* The world-wide trend toward secularity today is a threat to "religion" as popularly understood, but opens the way for a true comprehension of the nature of the Christian faith, which is not to be confused with the religion-in-general so prevalent in the United States. Christian faith is based on a special and decisive disclosure of God in and through Jesus of Nazareth. One who calls himself a Christian finds in this revelation of God in Christ the central meaning for his own life and for all human existence.

This Christian faith, when properly understood, speaks to the needs of modern youth. It can free them from anxiety about their status and give them a new sense of belonging and responsibility. It calls for a realistic and creative style of living in the world, as citizens of God's kingdom which transcends the world.

In this perspective the nature and role of a lay Christian movement becomes clearer. The Young Men's Christian Association is one important expression of the lay forces of

Christianity. Its purpose is not to foster "religion" in a general sense but to provide an association through which Christians, both young and old, can come to understand more clearly the relevance of Christian faith to daily life. Through the YMCA, often in close relationship to persons of other religious backgrounds, Christians can come face to face with the demands of their own faith, experience the reality of Christian discipleship, and be better prepared to carry out their occupational and civic duties. The urgent task confronting leaders of the YMCA is to take advantage of the new opportunities for a lay Christian movement in a rapidly changing social and religious setting.

- *A Christian Association in a Pluralist Society.* The present trend toward religious pluralism, particularly evident in the United States, represents an advance in many respects. It provides a framework within which persons from different religious communities can work together for common ends. But the relaxed climate which makes contact easier may result in a weakening of the desire for deeper communication among persons of different faiths. It may also lead Christians to discount elements of uniqueness in their faith in favor of a search for a universal religion.

The YMCA is particularly susceptible to these tendencies, because it often includes as members of one Association persons of different faiths or none. It is the responsibility of YMCA leaders to maintain the integrity of the Christian basis and orientation of this movement, but at the same time to foster genuine respect for persons of other faiths and encourage a deeper dialogue on basic questions of the meaning and purpose of life. The YMCA should provide for experiences of communication where there can be a real meeting of persons.

It is essential therefore that the distinctive elements of a Christian approach to character growth and to action in society be understood clearly and applied in personal counseling and all types of programs.

- *The YMCA and the Churches.* The relation of an independent lay Christian Association to the Christian churches of all confessions is to a considerable extent an unresolved problem, both theologically and in practice. This uncertainty is accentuated in the United States by the fact that the YMCA in this country has been largely Protestant in origin and outlook. Roman Catholic authorities have often warned their young people against becoming identified with an organization which might weaken allegiance to the Church.

But significant changes are taking place around the world in relationships between Protestants and Roman Catholics. And in many instances Catholics have found it possible to be active in the YMCA without compromise of conviction.

It is the responsibility of Association leaders in the United States to make clear that the YMCA seeks to be in the main stream of Christian tradition without being identified with any one confession, and to make it possible for members of all confessions to participate fully in the privileges and responsibilities of the Association. This aim calls for a re-affirmation of the intent to encourage all YMCA members to be active in the life and work of their particular churches. It points to the need for re-examining present practices in those aspects of YMCA program related specifically to religious thought and experience, so that differences among Christians of all denominations and confessions may be fully respected.

In this new perspective it becomes apparent that the YMCAs of the United States are in a position to make important contributions to Christian unity, both by fostering ecumenical education among their own members and by serving as a medium for lay interconfessional co-operation at many points in the community.

- *Impact on Persons.* The YMCA has always regarded the development of character as a major objective. Leaders need to be familiar with the findings of scientific research in this field, so that they can be realistic about the limitations under which they work as one of many influences in shap-

ing the attitudes and behavior of youth, and also clear about those approaches that are likely to be most effective.

It is particularly important that YMCA leaders should be aware of distinctive Christian insights and resources available to those who seek to influence the growth of persons. The significant point in YMCA program and counseling is not to pin a Christian label on an activity but to bring all the resources of the Christian faith to bear on every activity and relationship. This must be done with full respect for varying moral standards and religious traditions, but without compromise of basic Christian convictions about the worth of persons and the depth of love that should characterize all human relationships.

Such considerations call for a continuing reappraisal of processes of character education under YMCA auspices at different ages and stages, with special attention to the selection and preparation of leaders who work directly with children, youth, and adults. There must be a realistic understanding of the factors in modern life which lead to a lowering of moral standards and a resistance to conventional approaches to character education.

- *Action in Society.* In principle, the YMCA as a lay Christian movement with the expressed purpose of "building a Christian society" should be a vigorous force for the changing of social structures in obedience to the gospel. But, in fact, the YMCAs of the United States on the whole have been very cautious about taking any concerted action, locally or nationally, with regard to controversial social issues.

Current Christian thinking is quite realistic about the complexities of social change. Seldom is there any one answer to a specific social issue on which well-informed Christians can reach complete agreement. The Christian hears the prophetic voice of indignation, but he is entrusted also with a ministry of reconciliation.

Nevertheless, through their experience in the YMCA young people and adults should be developing a keen sense

of social responsibility and should be equipped to relate Christian insights courageously to decisions that all citizens face in American life today. A considerable number of members, particularly in Hi-Y Clubs and Student Associations, are aroused to a more vital social concern through the YMCA. But in relatively few YMCAs is this kind of education for social responsibility given a high priority. Frequently YMCA leaders seem to be more interested in keeping out of controversy than in encouraging forthright expressions of Christian social convictions.

YMCA practice in racial relationships is a striking example of this caution. In spite of repeated resolutions calling for an end to discrimination in use of YMCA facilities, a large number of YMCAs still practice segregation. The new perspective of the present hour in American life calls for leaders who will seek to foster genuine understanding and acceptance among persons of all races in the YMCA and to join with other organizations in working persistently for desegregation in all American communities.

- *World Perspective.* From the standpoint of Christian faith a world outlook should be inherent in every aspect of YMCA program. Important decisions of a local Association should be made in the perspective of belonging to a world movement. Such a perspective would aid greatly in defining the Christian basis of the YMCA and making this purpose effective in dealing with individuals and groups. It would be a significant factor also in educating for international understanding.

The response of American YMCAs to World Service undertakings is one of the most positive expressions of involvement in a world-wide movement. Yet many leaders have not recognized the place of such service as an *integral* part of the whole life and work of a local Association. And many are still looking upon the outreach abroad of the YMCAs of the United States as a purely bilateral undertaking instead of seeing it as an expression of responsible partnership in a World Alliance of YMCAs.

There is a call today for leaders who will be more keenly aware of the magnificent resources available to the YMCAs of this country by virtue of their belonging to a world-wide lay Christian movement. Such awareness would lead, for example, to greater interest in education about the United Nations and its specialized agencies, and to taking more advantage of opportunities for international travel and contact with foreign students in this country.

RETHINKING POLICIES REGARDING THE SELECTION OF LEADERS

What difference should these new perspectives make in the selection of YMCA leaders? Most statements about the qualifications of volunteer leaders are phrased in quite general terms and scarcely ever take into account the special needs of the times. They do, however, lay stress on the central Christian purpose of the YMCA as the basic criterion for selection.

The YMCA is a lay Christian organization. Its leadership is composed of lay men and women who seek through the YMCA and its program for youth and younger adults to extend Christian faith and commitment, strengthen the churches, and bring Christian standards to bear upon all aspects of life.²

Statements about the qualifications of the secretary are usually also quite general. One of the prerequisites for the YMCA secretaryship in the United States, included in an official document dealing with qualifications and training, is "an integration of thinking and experience around a Christian philosophy of life." A number of American YMCA leaders took part in a World Consultation on the Education and Training of Secretaries at Castle Mainau, Germany, in July, 1963. Here the Christian vocation of a secretary was a major item of discussion and the conclusions on this point are perhaps the clearest statement to date from any YMCA body:

- The task of a YMCA Secretary is to help achieve the basic purposes of the Young Men's Christian Association.
- The basis and orientation of the selection, education and training of Secretaries should be a conviction of the nature and purposes of the YMCA as an instrument in God's hands for the extension of his Kingdom.
- One evidence of a vital Christian faith on the part of a Secretary or a candidate for the Secretaryship is a compulsive sense of vocation. This involves both a consciousness of being called to serve God in and through one's daily occupation, whatever it might be, and a conviction that the YMCA is the best channel through which one may give the fullest expression of his interests and capabilities.
- Care should be taken, therefore, to select for the Secretaryship only those who have a high sense of Christian dedication and give evidence by their life and work of being able to serve effectively the YMCA Movement.

What kind of persons, both lay and professional, are to be called into leadership in the YMCA particularly in these times? Our study of new perspectives points to such attitudes, insights, and capacities as the following:

- Conviction that the central tendency or "essential genius" of the YMCA must continue to be Christian, no matter how diverse may be the religious backgrounds of the members.
- An ecumenical point of view; that is, a desire that the YMCA shall seek to serve all Christian churches without being identified with any, and that respect for all confessions shall be a guiding principle in policy and practice.
- A concern for applying Christian insights consistently to YMCA policy and practice in the community where moral, economic, racial, and political issues are involved. This does not mean that the leader should be tagged as either liberal or conservative, but it implies that he should be open to the leading of an enlightened Christian conscience on social questions.

- Capacity to evaluate the many-sided program of the YMCA in terms of the growth of individuals in personal integrity and social responsibility consistent with the Christian purpose of the Association.
- Some knowledge and experience of the YMCA in its broader aspects, including a keen interest in the World YMCA movement.

The fact that business acumen and community influence are not included in this list does not imply any disparagement of such qualifications. But a recent nation-wide study of YMCA Boards and Committees of Management shows that American Associations already have ample strength at these points. In the appraisal by general secretaries of the contributions of their directors to the work of the board, the highest rating goes to such items as "Contributes sound business judgment" . . . "Contributes skill in policy making" . . . "Has community-wide leadership and influence." Much farther down the list are these contributions: "Reflects religious thinking" . . . "Provides educational knowledge and judgment." And at the bottom of the ratings, seldom mentioned, are two items which reflect the upper middle-class orientation of most boards of directors: "Interprets viewpoint of labor" . . . "Is a forceful spokesman for minority groups." ³

The YMCAs of the United States have an outstanding record for attracting into top leadership men who merit confidence in business circles and carry weight in community affairs. But this record often has been achieved at the expense of a fair representation of all important segments of the constituency and keen insight into the religious and educational aspects of YMCA work. There is likely to be no significant change in the direction of the YMCAs of America unless steps are taken to get a better balance in the top leadership between administrative competence and prophetic vision. Reliable stewards of property we must have, but even more important are trustees of the essential Christian character of the YMCA.

Ordinarily it might be expected that those who are chosen for strategic leadership posts in the YMCA should have had considerable *experience in the Association*. The study referred to above showed to the surprise of the investigator that only a small proportion of board members were actively related to any aspect of YMCA program, aside from financial and membership campaigns, and that many had little or no experience as members before being elected to the board. Granted that there are instances where men can profitably be drawn in from the outside to make a special contribution to the YMCA from their experience in other organizations, it would be normal to entrust important decisions on policy to men and women who are thoroughly familiar with the Association, both locally and in its broader aspects. Otherwise we run the risk of determining policy on some basis other than the intrinsic nature and role of a lay Christian movement.

It is appropriate to refer again to that section of our study dealing with YMCA membership and movement policy as discussed in Chapter 8. It is from within the voting membership that persons should ordinarily be called to responsible leadership, provided that there is a well-considered plan for involving members periodically in discussion of important questions of YMCA policy. And there are resources within the membership which have not been fully utilized for the development of leadership, particularly young men and women, recent graduates with experience in Student Christian Associations, Negroes and members of other minority groups, young leaders in industrial circles including labor organizations.

Let us look next at the age of these leaders. The median age of the boards and committees included in the 1961 study was 47. This reflects a slight decline in comparison with previous studies. Only 7 per cent of the directors were under 35 years of age. These facts raise a serious question about the desire and/or willingness of the YMCAs of the United States to draw into strategic leadership younger men

and women. The criteria for selection outlined on a previous page do not, of course, depend primarily on age. There is no guarantee that younger persons will excel in Christian conviction, social concern, or educational insight. But it cannot be denied that young adults between 18 and 35 should be able to reflect more accurately the needs and points of view of the youthful members of the YMCA, or that they are likely to be more sensitive to changes in the social and religious situation that demand new directions in YMCA strategy. One item in the Centennial Declaration of the World Alliance at Paris in 1955 deserves to be quoted over and over again when decisions regarding leadership are at stake: "That because the YMCA was in origin, and remains, essentially a Christian movement of *youth*, its government and activities should increasingly be in the hands of young members who have committed themselves to the Christian faith and life."

There remains the important question of *religious affiliation*. For a long time it was written into the constitutions of most American YMCAs that the board of directors should be made up exclusively of members of an evangelical church. Originally, this proviso was aimed chiefly at Unitarians, since for decades there was little likelihood that any Roman Catholic would be considered. The 1961 study showed, somewhat surprisingly, that one out of six Associations (16 per cent) still maintains the evangelical church requirement. But now slightly over 4 per cent of board members are Roman Catholics and slightly under 2 per cent are Jews. This is a representative portion of the Jewish members, but far below the 20 per cent of Catholics in the membership.

As YMCAs give more attention to a truly ecumenical policy in membership and program, it is probable that the proportion of Roman Catholics in the leadership will increase as a matter of course. The inclusion of Jews among the directors of a YMCA is a more debatable question. Many feel that it is unfair, and possibly embarrassing, to ask a Jew

to help determine the policies of a Christian Association. Others are of the opinion that there should be no restrictions of church or faith so long as an individual agrees to support the general purposes and principles of the YMCA. If the criteria suggested in this chapter are accepted, some policy such as the following would seem to be in order:

Any Jew who is being considered for a position on an important YMCA committee should understand clearly that every Association is bound by the constitution of the National Council to accept the essential Christian character and purpose of the YMCA. If he is invited to share in the leadership of a local Association, it is because he can contribute something of importance to the furthering of the YMCA's objectives in the community. But it should be explicitly recognized (a) that he is not expected to suppress his own religious convictions and (b) that the control of the YMCA is to remain in the hands of Christians. He may then be encouraged to take part in YMCA leadership as far as he can conscientiously do so in the light of his religious tradition. What is to be guarded against by all means is any watering down of the distinctive Christian character of the YMCA because of the presence on committees or boards of Jews or others who are not orthodox Christians.

Most of what has been said in these comments on top leadership has been directed to volunteer leaders, but they would apply for the most part also to full-time professional workers. Secretaries in the American movement, without exception, are required to be members of a Christian church or to sign a personal statement which is clearly an expression of Christian faith. A conference of general secretaries several years ago, commissioned to deal with "The YMCA Executive's Responsibility as a Religious Leader," agreed on a series of propositions headed by a statement that such an executive has the responsibility "to conduct his own personal life in ways which stimulate continued religious

growth, deepen his own understanding of the Christian faith, and demonstrate this faith in personal and family life, in church membership and community service."⁴

This declaration is a reminder that beyond all matters of age, length of experience, church affiliation, or any other specific criterion for YMCA leaders is the primary importance of *personal example*. The Christian is called above all to be a disciple of Jesus Christ in both faith and life. Doing and being belong together: good works apart from the inner response to God are sterile; faith by itself apart from works is a shadow. In YMCA leadership there is no substitute for personal integrity and genuine good will for all men. A remark which was directed originally to preachers is equally applicable to YMCA leaders: "One who talks about these things but who in his own life is a fussy, bothered, anxious and confused person will teach quite the opposite of what his lips are saying."⁵ Some years ago, in a careful survey of the effectiveness of the Christian purpose in the YMCA, James McCandless found that "personal factors, that is, personal character, quality, and influence of the secretaries and leaders, both professional and volunteer, rate definitely and decisively at the top."

THE CONTINUING EDUCATION AND TRAINING OF LEADERS

Any discussion of the qualifications of YMCA leaders to match the times will be misleading, and may result in frustration, if it gives the impression that such leaders exist ready-made. Our aim in this concluding chapter is not to picture the ideal leader but to give some relatively simple clues to ways of developing the kind of leaders that are especially needed today. In seeking to discover young men and women who are qualified to become volunteer workers or secretaries in the YMCA we are not looking for those rare persons who have already "arrived," but for individuals who exhibit an eagerness to learn. They must of course demonstrate a stability of character and a capacity to deal

with both ideas and persons that give promise of continuing growth.

Again, we shall limit our attention to certain "plus" elements in the training of leaders for a lay Christian movement. We must take for granted the desirability of a sound general education and an alertness to what is going on in the world of public affairs and the arts. We have asserted more than once the need for one who works with youth to be familiar with the most important findings of the social and behavioral sciences. The value of specific skills in certain favorite program areas is recognized also without question.

But the point at which most American YMCA leaders feel the greatest need today is to *put more content and meaning into Christian faith*. Listen to replies from both board members and secretaries to the National Council inquiry in 1961:

We should become more articulate about our Christian purpose and nature.

We must create a laboratory-like situation for the application of Christian values in everyday living, with our membership developed into a warm, supporting fellowship.

It is my firm conviction that the YMCA must first of all find ways to insure that all secretaries understand, believe in, exemplify in their own lives, and are able to express and communicate the great truths of the Christian faith.

We need more emphasis on program design and leadership training to develop or reveal Christian understanding of ourselves and our world, and reason for commitment to Christian living.

In the Conference of General Secretaries referred to earlier, two of the specific responsibilities of the executive secretary mentioned most often were these: "to deepen his own understanding of the Christian faith through disciplines including study, meditation, worship"; and "to be able to interpret his faith and to interpret the YMCA as a Christian movement." Such expressions of opinion corroborate our own analysis earlier in this chapter which stressed (1) Chris-

tian conviction, (2) an ecumenical point of view, (3) Christian insight and courage in facing social issues, (4) evaluation of program in terms of Christian purpose, and (5) wider knowledge and experience of the YMCA movement.

The first reaction is likely to be that we must add more courses in religion to the curriculum of secretarial education and add more hours to institutes and training courses for volunteer leaders. But we submit that this is not the answer. Far more important is a thorough revision of present courses so that they focus more directly on the essential elements of the Christian faith in its biblical setting, historical development, current implications for the individual and society, and encounter with the world.

- *Biblical Setting.* One may "take" several courses in the Old and New Testament and still miss what is most needed for leadership in the YMCA. What one longs for in leaders is a grasp of the "unfolding drama of the Bible," a study of God's ways of dealing with men in the concrete issues of Hebrew life, an insight into the main lines of his revelation in Jesus of Nazareth, and an understanding of the development of the early Christian Community as it sought to bear witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ in a confused Roman and Hellenic environment. Along with this expanding knowledge the YMCA leader will be alert constantly to ways of interpreting the Bible in a living way to modern youth.

- *Historical Development.* The aim here will be not to cover the details of church history nor to master the various theological systems, but to trace the most significant developments of the main stream of Christian thought and life, with its chief Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant tributaries. Special attention will be given to the American scene with the emergence of the "three-faith" partnership of Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism which has become the accepted pattern of American society. The rapidly changing ecumenical situation will be an important concluding chapter in this panoramic view of the development of the Christian movement.

- *Current Educational and Social Implications.* Here the sequence of studies is less clear, but the focus will be on those insights from Christian faith about man and society which provide a frame of reference for a critical evaluation of group work and counseling, and of ethics as applied to personal conduct, interpersonal relationships, and social issues. Important, too, will be an examination of processes of social change that are in harmony with the twin Christian ministries of judgment and reconciliation.

- *Encounter with the World.* The Christian faith has always been characterized by a sense of mission, a dynamic outward thrust into all parts of the world and a penetration into all areas of human life. Every Christian ought to understand the basis for this challenge to all other religious systems and secular faiths, even though he will not be able to study all the competing "isms" and ideologies in detail. The leader in a lay Christian movement needs particularly to explore current efforts to bring the insights of the gospel to bear on science, industry, government, and the arts.

Here is a "curriculum" of exciting possibilities for men and women who look upon the Young Men's Christian Association as a movement worthy of their support as volunteer workers or full-time secretaries. These are not the titles of courses but the main threads, which might well be interwoven into many aspects of leadership training. A focus in this direction would help to overcome the present fragmentation of training experiences which many deplore.

Side by side with such efforts to develop a deeper insight into the content and meaning of the Christian faith should go an ever-growing understanding of the nature and mission of the YMCA movement, both in its American expression and throughout the world. This would be no academic study of the history of the YMCA but an effort to grasp more fully the genius of this movement and to see how its development is conditioned by the social and religious situation in different countries. Can anyone doubt that leadership in this movement presents a challenge to *continuing educa-*

tion, calling for all the thought and energy which God has put at one's disposal?

* * * * *

"A world-wide fellowship united by a common loyalty to Jesus Christ": many have pointed out that this is not a factual description of the total membership of YMCAs around the world; but few will doubt that it is an accurate designation for the smaller nucleus of members and leaders who constitute the working force of this movement. We are called to be loyal, not to a set of values or a system of ethics, but to a Person in whom God was manifest supremely. To reflect this loyalty in one's life and thereby to reveal to others the Power that makes this commitment possible, is a leader's greatest contribution to the youth with whom he works within the fellowship of the Young Men's Christian Association.

Notes for Chapter 10

¹ *New Tasks for the YMCA*, Study Guide for the World Council of YMCAs (Geneva: World Alliance of YMCAs, 1961), p. 71.

² "The YMCA in the American Community," statement approved by National Council, 1957.

³ *Study of YMCA Boards and Committees of Management*, National Council of YMCAs, from data gathered in 1961.

⁴ Report to General Secretaries Section, Triennial Conference, 1956.

⁵ W. Norman Pittenger, *Proclaiming Christ Today* (New York: Seabury Press, Inc., 1962), p. 60.

Books for Further Reading

The brief notes on the books listed below may help individual leaders to determine the source materials of special value to them. Most, but not all, of these publications have been referred to in this study of new perspectives.

Any list of this kind could be lengthened indefinitely. We have selected for the most part books of quite recent origin, not because they are necessarily better than earlier publications, but because they are more likely to reflect current social and theological developments. Priority has been given to relatively inexpensive and nontechnical books of special usefulness to workers in a lay Christian movement.

It will be noted that the Association Press is one of the
223 leading publishers in this field, not only of materials directly

related to the YMCA but of books dealing with lively current questions of Christian thought and practice. Available also is a wide range of smaller Reflection Books, which have elicited highly favorable comment from leaders in churches and other organizations. All too few YMCAs are using to the full this valuable resource for leadership training and personal enrichment within their own movement.

I/THE CHRISTIAN IN THE WORLD

Berger, Peter L., *The Precarious Vision* (New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1961). A sociologist looks at social fictions and Christian faith; a provocative critique of religious rationalizations, related particularly to American religious life and culture.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich, *Prisoner for God* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1957). Also in paperback, under title of *Letters and Papers from Prison*. A translation of the papers and letters from prison of a German pastor executed in 1945 because of his opposition to the Hitler regime; edited by Eberhard Bethge; highly original and moving reflections on life and suffering.

Jenkins, David, *Beyond Religion* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962). A small but illuminating book dealing with the truth and error in "religionless" Christianity; special attention to the views of Bonhoeffer and Tillich.

Leclercq, Jacques, *Christians in the World* (New York: Sheed & Ward, Inc., 1961). Translation of a book written in 1958 by a Roman Catholic Canon, Professor of Moral and Social Philosophy at the University of Louvain, Belgium; an essay on the role of the laity.

Raughley, Ralph C., ed., *New Frontiers of Christianity* (New York: Association Press, 1962). A symposium on twelve major areas of contemporary life by as many different writers, including John Bennett, Norman Goodall, Reuel Howe, Roger Shinn; significant developments on these frontiers.

Smith, Ronald G., *The New Man* (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1956). Subtitle: Christianity and Man's Coming of Age; toward a new theological understanding of man in history.

Webber, George W., *God's Colony in Man's World* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1960). The mission of the church and the laity in the inner city, based on experience in the East Harlem Protestant Parish of New York City.

Weber, Hans-Ruedi, *Salty Christians* (New York: Seabury Press, Inc., 1963). Pub. in pamphlet size, originally a handbook for lay training written at the request of the East Asia Christian Conference; a non-technical consideration of the ministry of laity in the world.

West, Charles C., *Outside the Camp* (New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1959). The Christian mission in today's revolutionary world, oriented particularly to students who are seeking a realistic appraisal.

II/RELIGION IN AMERICA

Herberg, Will, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew* (New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1955). A sociological study of the religious situation in the United States, with special reference to the development of the three major religious communities in a national partnership.

Littell, Franklin H., *From State Church to Pluralism* (New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1962), paperback. A Protestant interpreta-

tion of religion in American history from Colonial times to the present.

Marty, Martin E., *The New Shape of American Religion* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1958). A critical analysis of religion-in-general in America, with implications for parish practice.

———, *Second Chance for American Protestants* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1963). A sequel to the earlier book, stressing the plight and opportunity of Christians displaced in a post-Christian culture.

Religion and American Society (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, 1961). Pamphlet; a Statement of Principles growing out of discussions by eight prominent American leaders; publication of a Center established by The Fund for the Republic.

Religion in America, John Cogley, ed. (Cleveland, Ohio: World Publishing Co., 1958), paperback. Essays on Religion in a Free Society, given at a seminar sponsored by The Fund for the Republic; Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish contributors, including John C. Murray, Reinhold Niebuhr, Will Herberg.

III/RACE AND RELIGION IN AMERICA

Bird, Robert S., *Ten Negroes*, reprint of articles from *New York Herald Tribune*, 1963. A journalist's account of interviews with a number of prominent Negroes from various walks of life and what these men and women say about the situation of the Negro in American life today.

Dean, John P., and **Rosen, Alex**, *A Manual of Intergroup Relations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955). Although this book

does not deal with race relations in a specifically religious perspective, it is included here as a practical manual for bringing about changes in intergroup relations in public institutions and voluntary agencies.

Sellers, James, *The South and Christian Ethics* (New York: Association Press, 1962). A sympathetic but critical study of the South by a young theological professor from the South; a theological analysis of the problem of race relations.

Race: Challenge to Religion (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1963). Papers delivered at the National Conference on Religion and Race sponsored by social action bodies of Protestants, Catholics and Jews, held in Chicago in January, 1963.

IV/THE CHRISTIAN GOSPEL AND ITS MESSAGE FOR TODAY

Baillie, Donald M., *God Was in Christ* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948). A carefully reasoned examination of the relationship of the two natures in Jesus the Christ.

Hamilton, William, *The New Essence of Christianity* (New York: Association Press, 1961). Basic "fragments" of Christian faith for the modern age, concluding with the style of life required of Christians today.

Keck, Leander E., *Taking the Bible Seriously* (New York: Association Press, 1962). A nontechnical introduction to the reading and use of the Bible, stressing the Bible as a record of God's encounter with men.

Oman, John, *Grace and Personality* (New York: Association Press, 1961), paperback. New printing of a book written many years ago

by a Scottish theologian, with deep insights into the meaning of grace in Christian faith.

Pittenger, W. Norman, *Proclaiming Christ Today* (New York: Seabury Press, Inc. 1962). This is directed to the preaching of the gospel in and through the Church, but written in a vigorous style suitable for lay readers concerned with understanding what Christian faith has to say to our day.

Robinson, John S., *Honest to God* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1963), paperback. A searching re-examination of basic Christian concepts by the Bishop of Woolwich; widely discussed in England; provocative, although giving few answers.

Spike, Robert W., *To Be a Man* (New York: Association Press, 1961). Based on lectures given at the 1960 Triennial Conference of the Association of Secretaries; a style of living for the Christian today at work, at leisure, in love, at worship.

Stinnette, Charles R., Jr., *Grace and the Searching of Our Heart* (New York: Association Press, 1962). Subtitled "A companion for self-discovery and renewal"; a meditative approach to theology for those living under the routine of the "8:15."

V/ECUMENICAL AND INTERFAITH RELATIONSHIPS

Brown, Robert M., and **Weigel, Gustave**, *An American Dialogue* (New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1961), paperback. A thoroughgoing dialogue between Professors Robert McAfee Brown and Gustave Weigel; a Protestant looks at Catholicism, and a Catholic looks at Protestantism; foreword by Will Herberg.

Cooke, Gerald, *As Christians Face Rival Religions* (New York: Association Press, 1962). A fresh examination of the present confrontation

among world religions, with suggestions for "community without compromise."

Ecumenist, The, a Journal for Promoting Christian Unity. Bi-monthly publication, Paulist Press, New York.

Hordern, William, *A Layman's Guide to Protestant Theology* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955). One of the best available guides to an understanding of modern developments in Christian thought, written with the conviction that there is need for laymen to do more creative thinking about theology.

Kertzer, Morris N., *What Is a Jew?* (Cleveland, Ohio: World Publishing Co., 1961), paperback. Answers to 100 or more questions which Jews and Gentiles ask about the beliefs and traditions of Judaism.

Küng, Hans, *The Council, Reform and Reunion* (New York: Sheed & Ward, Inc., 1961). A widely hailed book preceding the Second Vatican Council, by a young German professor on the Catholic Theological Faculty of the University of Tübingen; stress on the need for renewal in the Church.

———, *That the World May Believe* (New York: Sheed & Ward, Inc., 1963). A series of letters addressed to a Catholic university student on personal and theological problems confronting a Catholic in the modern world; written informally, illuminating.

Neill, Stephen, *Christian Faith and Other Faiths* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961). A thorough but nontechnical treatment of the Christian dialogue with other religions; includes chapters on Marxism and Existentialism; by a well-known Anglican bishop and author.

Visser 't Hooft, W. A., *No Other Name* (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1963), paperback. A stirring analysis of syncretism

in ancient and modern forms; the Christian answer to syncretism; by the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches.

Weigel, Gustave, *Faith and Understanding in America* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1959—also paperback, 1962). Father Weigel examines the challenges facing Christians in America today, including Catholic-Protestant relationships.

VI/CHARACTER EDUCATION AND CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Miller, Randolph C., *Christian Nurture and the Church* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961). The philosophy and practice of Christian education in biblical and historical perspective.

Peck, Robert F., and **Havighurst, Robert J.**, *The Psychology of Character Development* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1960). A basic sourcebook in this field, formulating a theory of character education based on many years of research.

Phenix, Philip H., *Religious Concerns in Contemporary Education* (New York: Teachers College Bureau of Publications, 1963). A study of reciprocal relations between religion and education in contemporary American culture; oriented chiefly to public education.

Shinn, Roger L., *The Educational Mission of Our Church* (Boston and Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1962). Although directed particularly to the curriculum of the United Church of Christ, of general value as a practical philosophy of Christian education.

VII/YMCA STUDIES AND CONSULTATIONS (NATIONAL AND WORLD)

1955: *And Now—Tomorrow*, Report of World YMCA Centennial Conference (Paris).

1957: *The YMCA, the Church and Christian Unity*, Report of Commission to World Council of YMCAs.

1960: *Report of Fifth World YMCA Consultation on Health and Physical Education* (Rome).

1961: *Called to New Things*, Report of Third World Council of YMCAs (Geneva).

1962: *Basic Issues in YMCA Ecumenical Policy and Practice*, World Alliance of YMCAs.

1962: *Report of Joint YMCA-YWCA Consultation on Ecumenical Policy and Practice of Lay Christian Movements* (St. Cergue).

1962: **Harold C. Harlow, Jr.**, *Racial Integration in the YMCA*, National Council.

1963: **Allen S. Ellsworth**, *Young Men and Women*, National Council Bureau of Studies.

A. Christian Emphasis in YMCA Program

Some Fundamental Considerations¹

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A CHRISTIAN

Let us come to the heart of the matter at once by stating in simple terms what it means to be a Christian. We must look for elements in Christianity so basic that they are accepted as valid by the great majority of Christians, even though there be wide differences in forms and phrases. Difficult as this endeavor may seem, it is more fruitful than attempting to define what it means to be *religious*. Christianity is an objective historical movement; "religion" is a phenomenon that takes widely different forms—some primitive in moral standards, others defying the State or the Volk. The words "religious" and "Christian" are too often
233 used as if they were identical and interchangeable.²

1. Being a Christian involves sincere personal commitment to God as revealed supremely in Jesus of Nazareth and humble trust in the fulfillment of God's purposes in human history and in the lives of individuals.

2. Being a Christian involves a devotion to Jesus Christ, who through his teachings and his life and death made clear the nature and purpose of God and who lives on in Christian experience as a source of light and power.

3. Being a Christian involves a keen awareness of one's own shortcomings and of one's share of responsibility for the ills of the world, which saves one from self-righteousness and makes one slow to judge others and quick to forgive them.

4. Being a Christian involves a respect for every person one meets as of worth in the sight of God, a respect that leads one to be concerned about the welfare and growth of others. This regard for persons is not limited by color, nationality, or social status; it even includes enemies.

5. Being a Christian involves the attitude of a learner, a responsiveness to God's guidance, a constant seeking for the achievement of God's purposes for the individual and for the world.

6. Being a Christian involves a recognition that one is a member of a Christian community or fellowship, world-

wide in scope and extending back through the centuries, expressed in tangible form in the Church. In this community of Christians one finds strength and guidance through worship and study and is expected to carry his share of responsibility.

7. Being a Christian involves a concern to extend the way of Christ to persons and areas of life that do not now accept his gospel. It impels one to speak his convictions about God and man without fear and to be willing to suffer if necessary for the right.

Such a list of basic elements in Christianity is of course subject to refinement and modification, but it will serve at least as a starting-point for discussion of the Christian emphasis in YMCA program. These seven insights and experiences are clearly reflected in the Sermon on the Mount and elsewhere in the Gospels and the Book of the Acts. They are not really seven separate items to be listed in order, but related phases of a total experience. They represent an outlook on life that may find expression in theological terms in a variety of ways. A recent effort within Association circles to restate these affirmations of Christian faith has come from the Student Divisions of the YMCA and the YWCA.

HOW PERSONS GROW

Our next step is to look at the types of experience that
235 youth and adults have in YMCAs and to locate the points

which are crucial for growth in Christian insight and living. Among all the contacts within the wide range of Association relationships and among all the forms of participation in Association activities, which are most significant from the standpoint of Christian emphasis?

Drawing upon our knowledge of how personality is formed in general, with no reference at the moment to distinctively Christian elements, we can state with confidence that growth takes place at these strategic points:

- where persons are forming *friendships*—in gangs or clubs, in boy-girl relationships or “pal”-“buddy” friendships, through working together on projects;
- where persons feel the impact of *ideas*—in classroom or discussion groups, in personal conference, at the theater, in the library;
- where persons are called upon to make *decisions*—in regard to lifework, education, marriage, enlistment; with reference to personal habits such as drinking; on committees or councils where policies are being formed;
- where persons are carrying out *responsibilities*—in classroom or group leadership, on basketball floor, in organizing a financial campaign, in facing danger in the air or on the battlefield; in working for more adequate recreational facilities for the town;
- where persons are having experiences of *spiritual renewal*³—in private meditation or group worship, in listening to music,

on occasions where achievement is recognized, in moments of deeper fellowship within the family or circle of friends.

KEY POINTS FOR CHRISTIANS IN THE YMCA

A list like this is inevitably incomplete and some items in it overlap; but it represents another step toward getting down to brass tacks when we talk about opportunities for Christian education in the YMCA. Look now at these strategic experiences from the standpoint of phases of the Association program that may be utilized best for the growth of Christian personality. Another list soon takes form, indicating key points for Christian emphasis:

1. *Group Experience.* Our concern here is for the quality of relationships that exist within small groups—clubs, teams, interest groups—where there is frequent opportunity for informal contact and group decisions. The relations between the leader or adviser and the group is of crucial importance. Further analysis in a later chapter will show that there is a close correlation between good “group work” and the basic elements of Christianity outlined earlier. The fact that small groups of various kinds are at the heart of the YMCA’s program, at least with younger boys and teenage young people, makes this a point worthy of special attention.

2. *Personal Contacts.* Here we focus upon those person-to-person relationships that abound in every Young Men’s

Christian Association. Respect for the individual, so central in the Christian outlook on life, has definite implications for the way each person is inducted into membership in the Association and for the guidance he receives in working out his schedule of activities. This is the point, too, where the evangelical motivation of the YMCA leader has its best chance to function, not only in direct personal conferences about a member's life philosophy but in relation to the individual's daily conduct and attitudes. Even brief contacts at the desk with references to ordinary services rendered by the Association may pave the way for more significant personal relationships.

3. *Challenges to Thinking.* Most persons come to a YMCA for recreation or for physical conditioning rather than for general education. Systematic Bible study and religious instruction have been delegated for the most part to the churches. Yet any Christian Association worthy of the name seeks to put *content* into its Christian emphasis. For one thing, this involves provision for stimulating discussions in clubs and forums regarding the implications of Christianity for personal living and social change. It calls also for some direct interpretation of the meaning of Christian faith, with due respect for differences of religious background. It may call for a re-examination of YMCA religious services from the standpoint of prophetic challenge.

4. *Projects of Service and Action.* To provide a laboratory in which members may gain experience in making decisions

and carrying out responsibilities is a major opportunity of the YMCA. One thinks immediately of club business meetings, of camp councils, of contests and exhibits. One thinks also of World Service projects, of Hi-Y model legislatures, of efforts to improve conditions in the community. If these plans and activities are carried out with conscious regard to Christian values, they become channels for the concrete expression of personal commitment and social concern.

5. *Periods of Meditation and Worship.* Many will think of religious services as the most obvious point for Christian emphasis in YMCA program. A recent survey shows that inspirational meetings and periods for worship are very common in YMCAs, particularly at certain seasons of the year. Under favorable circumstances such programs may be of central significance for gaining new insight and experiencing spiritual renewal. But such results are not likely to occur unless worship is planned with care and closely related to the individual's daily experience. We must take into account also the provision that is made for devotional guides and other types of literature on religion; for the time spent alone in reading and meditation may be of primary import for personal growth.

6. *Interpretation of YMCA Membership.* To have a sense of belonging to a movement with a great tradition and a
 239 great mission for the world may be a powerful stimulus for

youth. We have learned this to our sorrow in dealing with fascism and other anti-Christian forces. The World Christian Community—the Church Universal—is a functioning movement of tremendous power for those who recognize their place in it. Young Men's Christian Associations around the world are a part of this inclusive fellowship of those who are bound together in loyalty to Jesus Christ. Our problem of Christian emphasis to a considerable degree consists in finding ways of interpreting an individual's experience in YMCA clubs and activities in terms of membership in this larger Christian community. The recent trend toward defining membership on the basis of purpose and responsibility, rather than the mere use of privileges, is bound to make our Christian emphasis more effective. The problem is partly one of drawing persons from the marginal fringe of participation into the inner circle of Christian fellowship. It also involves a clearer recognition of the relation between the YMCA and the churches with a definite goal of winning youth for active, meaningful church membership. Even more difficult than this kind of interpretation is the requirement that the YMCA shall demonstrate in its own corporate life the reality of the Christian community. What will it profit to talk about "fellowship" unless there is a corresponding effort to develop a truly Christian association of young men? Such a goal makes heavy demands upon the board of directors and policy-forming committees of the YMCA.

HOW TO JUDGE THE CHRISTIAN QUALITY OF AN ASSOCIATION PROGRAM

We are now ready to draw conclusions regarding the problem with which this chapter began: to locate those activities and relationships within the whole YMCA program that are most significant for the realization of our Christian purposes. On the basis of the "key points" outlined above we can formulate six major questions as a guide to appraising the quality of any Association program from the standpoint of a Christian emphasis:

1. Does the YMCA foster the kind of *experience in small groups* which develops relationships that are Christian in quality?

2. Are the *personal contacts* within the YMCA among members and with leaders characterized by a sincere effort to stimulate individuals to growth in Christian insight, attitudes, and commitment?

3. Does the YMCA sponsor programs for both regular groups and special occasions that lead individuals to a more *fundamental understanding of the Christian outlook on life* and that *challenge serious thinking* on social issues where Christian values are at stake?

241 4. Does the YMCA encourage *projects of service and action* that give members experience in making decisions and

carrying responsibilities in accordance with Christian principles?

5. Are opportunities for *personal meditation and group worship* provided by the YMCA in such a way that they touch life deeply and lead to spiritual renewal?

6. Does *membership in the YMCA* lead persons to a growing appreciation of the world-wide Christian community, as well as of local churches, and to active participation in this Christian movement?

Such a series of questions has a cutting edge, however, only when content is put into the word "Christian" along the lines indicated earlier in this chapter. The validity of these criteria for evaluating a YMCA program can be tested by checking them against the distinctive characteristics of the YMCA movement.

¹ From *Christian Emphasis in YMCA Program* by Paul M. Limbert (New York: Association Press, 1944). This section was published in *National Council Bulletin*, Oct., 1944.

² Much of what we say about Christianity is characteristic also of Judaism, because of the continuity in the Jewish and Christian traditions. However, if one sets down in similar terms what it means to be a Jew, he will note some important distinctions.

³ "Whatever elevates life, beautifies it with significance, makes its appreciation of nature keener, its happiness in art richer, its moral prac-

tices more wholesome, its social relationships more humane is spiritual. Whatever gives men creative joy in their work, redeems life from drudgery, and baptizes it with purposeful meaning is spiritual. Wherever men find in life not simply things that serve them but values which they serve, so that they are ennobled by devotion, purified by a real and inward worship of the Divine made concrete in an experience of goodness, truth, or beauty, they are winning spiritual life." (Harry Emerson Fosdick, *As I See Religion* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1932), p. 82.

B. Christian Purpose and Practice in the YMCA Today¹

The National Council, on recommendation of the National Board and in follow-up of discussion throughout the country and consideration at the 1962 meeting of the Council itself, adopted unanimously the following affirmation regarding the central purposes of the YMCA as a Christian organization.

The National Council of the Young Men's Christian Associations of the United States adopts and commends to the

Area, State, and local YMCAs the following statement regarding the Christian character and objectives of the YMCA movement in the United States:

We reaffirm the historic statement of the purpose and nature of the YMCAs as set forth in the constitution of the National Council:

The Young Men's Christian Association we regard as being in its essential genius a world-wide fellowship united by a common loyalty to Jesus Christ for the purpose of developing Christian personality and building a Christian society.

We recognize and consider it healthy that diversity exists among our Associations in the manner in which this purpose is to be achieved.

We welcome as members of our Associations persons of all religious affiliations who wish to join and co-operate in support of the Christian ideals and values for which we stand. Each member is encouraged to be faithful to the teachings and practices of his own church.

In giving effect to our Christian ideals and values, our Associations offer to the men, women, boys and girls who

participate in their programs opportunities for experiences that will help them

- to develop self-confidence and self-respect and an appreciation of their own worth as individuals;
- to develop a faith for daily living based upon the teachings of Jesus, that they may thereby be helped in achieving their highest potential as children of God;
- to grow as responsible members of their families and citizens of their communities;
- to appreciate that health of mind and body is a sacred gift and that physical fitness and mental well-being are conditions to be achieved and maintained;
- to recognize the worth of all persons, and to work for inter-racial intergroup understanding;
- to develop a sense of world-mindedness, and to work for world-wide understanding;
- to develop their capacities for leadership and use them responsibly in their own groups and in community life.

247 The Young Men's Christian Association is a lay Christian movement, working closely with the churches although in-

dependent in organization and free from ecclesiastical control. It seeks to find forms of lay religious expression that will reflect understanding of the teachings and practices of all the churches to which YMCA members belong.

¹ From the record of the 37th annual meeting of the National Council of the YMCAs of the U.S.A., Cleveland, Ohio, May 10-12, 1963.

Report and Recommendations of a Council Work Group That Considered Implementations of the Foregoing Statement

STATEMENTS OF PURPOSE OF MEMBER ASSOCIATIONS

1. Local Associations are encouraged to formulate their own statements of purpose, seeking to interpret the nature and objectives of the YMCA in relation to local situations and needs. The National Statement of Purpose pertains to the membership of Associations in the National Council. Local statements of purpose should take into account the diversity that exists within their own membership. But any statement of purpose of a local Association should be consistent with the spirit of the National Statement and the latter should, of course, be taken into account in any local consideration of the purpose of the YMCA.

2. This recommendation about the value of study and review of statements of purpose by Local YMCAs should be transmitted by the National Board to all member Associations with a request for reports of any recent

studies of the purpose of the YMCA locally or any plans for such re-examination. Along with this communication from the National office should go illustrations of existing statements of purpose from a number of local Associations, with some indication of the procedure followed in developing these statements.

PURPOSE AND PROGRAM

The prime means by which YMCAs seek to implement their purpose is through planning and conducting programs which provide persons with meaningful opportunities for significant growth in spirit, mind, and body. In the process of translating purpose into reality in the lives of persons, the YMCA at all organizational levels is challenged to use, as a guide, the statement approved by the National Council in 1963 regarding the Christian character and objectives of the YMCA movement in the United States, in order that

- (1) program objectives for all activities can be established in relation to purpose;
- (2) program can be planned for excellence, even at the expense of quantity, with focus on the worth of the individual as a child of God;
- (3) lay leadership related to program will be qualified, dedicated to the YMCA's Christian purpose and provided with planned opportunity to gain increasing understanding of this purpose;
- (4) staff responsible for program will have the required professional education, be competent, adequately rewarded and encouraged to produce only a quality program related to purpose;
- (5) program content, without being in the nature of a creed or doctrine, can be oriented to the Christian ethic and way of living, taking into

account the need to begin working with people where they are in understanding and readiness. This suggests strong emphasis on helping members develop in civic, vocational, and family responsibility, as well as on providing opportunities for members, volunteer leaders, and staff to share in appropriate ways their understanding of their respective faiths;

- (6) YMCAs will welcome into program activities persons of other confessions and faiths without compromising or changing the purpose of the YMCA;
- (7) periodic review and evaluation can be made to determine the effectiveness of program measured against the YMCA purpose and its related objectives.

It is recommended that lay and staff leaders at all organizational levels take initiative in a continuous process of collecting and distributing information about experiences of success in interpreting the YMCA's Christian purpose through program.

PURPOSE AND YMCA-CHURCH RELATIONSHIPS

Because of an increasingly favorable ecumenical climate today as well as in the light of the historic pioneering role of the YMCA in working for Christian unity, this is an appropriate time for YMCAs to extend and strengthen their relationship with the churches of all Christian confessions. Such a relationship of mutual confidence will be enhanced if every YMCA secretary is an active member in the church of his choice and if there is an assurance that the control of the YMCA is in the hands of Christians, although this does not preclude participation in its management by some individuals who are not members of Christian churches.

The relationship between the YMCA and the churches of a community can be strengthened in such practical ways as the following:

- (1) by making clear to church leaders the desire of the YMCA that every member be encouraged to be faithful to the teachings and practices of his own church;
- (2) by explaining to all members, but particularly to those of other than Protestant churches the ecumenical policy of the YMCA as stated in the National Council action of 1963, and by seeking to understand and serve the specific religious needs of each member;
- (3) by seeking information and advice from leaders of the churches of the community with regard to ways in which members of their churches who are also active in the YMCA can take part acceptably in the specifically religious activities of the YMCA.

It is recommended:

- (1) That the National Board and its constituent committees consider ways of assisting local Associations to develop more effective relationships with individual churches and with Councils of Churches along the lines suggested above;
- (2) That in training experiences for board members and secretaries the strengthening of the relationship of the YMCA to the churches of all denominations and confessions be included as a matter for urgent consideration.

PURPOSE AND MEMBERSHIP

The statement, reaffirmed at this Council meeting, says that we welcome as members of our Associations persons of all religious affiliations

who wish to join and co-operate in support of the Christian ideals and values for which we stand. Although not all would agree, the consensus was that such a member should be fully qualified, eligible for positions of leadership up to and including membership on boards of management and boards of directors. We have confidence in the integrity and responsibility of local Associations to determine the quality of commitment of non-Christians to the ideals and values for which the YMCA stands and believe that the acceptance of this principle would not, in practice, result in the control of Associations passing out of the hands of the dedicated Christians who represent the essential genius of the YMCA.

At present, there is much diversity among local Associations in constitutional or by-law restrictions on membership or voting membership or on eligibility for office and in actual practice in these regards.

- (1) *It is recommended* that local Associations be encouraged to review such requirements and practices regarding membership in the light of this National Council action; and that to facilitate this review, appropriate steps be taken to assemble and circulate representative sections of local Association constitutions and by-laws relating to such provisions.
- (2) *It is recommended* that membership in the YMCA, whatever the local Association's requirements, be made a more meaningful experience. Many of our so-called members are merely consumers, purchasers of services. We need to intensify our efforts to help them move toward meaningful membership. A clear definition of membership, its significance and responsibilities, should be developed to aid in this task—as should orientation courses or material for new members.

PURPOSE AND LEADERSHIP

Recognizing that the quality and competence of YMCA leadership is most important in working toward purpose, *it is recommended*:

- (1) that increased efforts be taken to encourage the most capable and highly qualified young people, involved in YMCA program, to train for professional careers in the YMCA;
- (2) that steps be taken to provide undergraduate and postgraduate training opportunities for prospective YMCA secretaries which focus on the newer theological and ecumenical developments;
- (3) that YMCA secretaries be active in their own churches;
- (4) that plans for recruiting lay leadership at all levels of YMCA organization provide for securing persons who represent the highest type of Christian character and for helping them to express their Christianity in planning and guiding activities based upon the Christian purpose of the YMCA;
- (5) that YMCA boards be periodically involved in training activities which renew each member's understanding of his key position in determining the Christian nature and tone of his Association by the kind of policy it adopts and by its insistence upon application of Christian principles at all levels of program and operation.

GENERAL

It is recommended that the procedure followed during the last three years, and particularly in this 1963 National Council meeting, with regard

to a more effective expression of Christian purpose and practice in the YMCA, be commended to local Associations and that the National Board make leadership and materials resources available to this end.

COUNCIL ACTION

The Council received the foregoing report with appreciation and voted its approval.

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NEW PERSPECTIVES FOR THE YMCA

is a catalytic book. For some, its reading will be a discomfiting experience. For others, it will conjure up exhilarating visions of opening doors and growth.

For those in the YMCA movement, and for those outside who are sympathetic with its goals, Dr. Limbert presents a candid analysis of weaknesses and strengths—many of them paralleling those in other service organizations—and encourages constructively critical reassessments of goals and methods to be applied at all levels.

Dr. Limbert focuses sharply, from both religious and social salients, on such factors as these:

- the YMCA's identification with Protestantism vs. its growing ecumenical relationships with Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox adherents
- the YMCA's Christian base vs. its reaching out to Jews and other non-Christians, in service and respect
- the YMCA's Christian motivation vs. its tendency to accommodate to the "religion in general" permeating American culture
- the YMCA's goal of a Christian society vs. its social neutrality
- the YMCA's prevalent parochialism vs. its world service goals
- the YMCA's goal of service to all youth vs. its image as a haven for "good" boys and girls with middle-class values

These antitheses can pass; the vistas are large. Many of the apparent contradictions become tangible opportunities for acceleration forward in many areas . . . from the YMCA's role in intra-Christian and interfaith dialog, and its stance in race relations, to individual character education and the training of new leaders fully capable of coping as Christians with a frenziedly changing world.

Dr. Limbert provides a manual for intensive discussion by the YMCA's leaders and constituency. At the same time, he provides a message of increasingly cordial relationships with the YMCA's friends among other faiths—and none. His book is, additionally, a significant sociological study to document the changing role of a major voluntary organization in a nation and world undergoing profound social change.

PAUL M. LIMBERT

Following professorial posts at Teachers College, Columbia University, and Franklin and Marshall College, Dr. Limbert began his first professional relationship with the YMCA as Professor of Education and Director of Graduate Study at Springfield College, later being named its President.

From 1943 to 1945, he served on the Program Staff, National Board of YMCAs of the U.S.A., and later with the World's Committee, YMCA. In 1952, he became Secretary General of the YMCA's World Alliance in Geneva, Switzerland, a post which he held for a decade. In 1963, Dr. Limbert ac-

cepted the position of Executive Secretary of the Y's Blue Ridge Assembly in North Carolina.

He is the author of *Education for Civic Responsibility* (1941) and *Christian Emphasis in YMCA Program* (1944); he was editor of *Christian Values and College Teaching*.

